

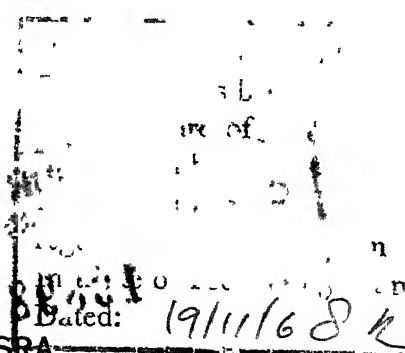
MORAL REASONING : A CRITICAL STUDY

With special reference to C. L. Stevenson, S. E. Toulmin,
R. M. Hare and K. Baier

A thesis Submitted
In Partial Fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

RAMASHANKER MISRA



to the


DEPARTMENT OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES
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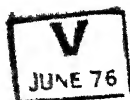
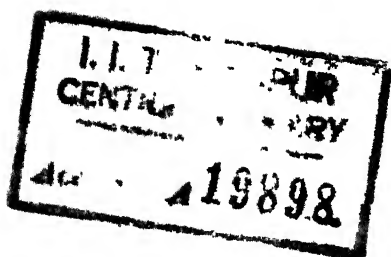
CERTIFICATE

This dissertation, entitled "Moral Reasoning: A Critical Study with special reference to C. L. Stevenson, S. E. Toulmin, R. M. Hare and K. Baier" - is the work of Mr. Ramashanker Misra, under my supervision.

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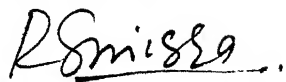
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A constant help at every stage of my work has been my wife (and colleague) Karuna. She read and discussed the manuscript, supervised the typing -- in short, was an exact opposite of Kantippe. I thank her. For all the errors that may remain, only I am responsible.


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SYNOPSIS

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Moral Reasoning: A Critical Study

**With special reference to C.L. Stevenson, S.E. Toulmin,
R.M. Hare and K. Baier.**

The present work aims at studying the nature of moral reasoning. Though the problem of moral reasoning has interested and puzzled philosophers, beginning with Aristotle, yet, never before has it aroused such vehement discussion as in the present century. A group of philosophers, led by A.J. Ayer, R. Carnap and some others, deny the legitimacy of what is called moral reasoning. In accordance with their analyses of moral language, they regard ethical utterances as mere expressions of emotions and feelings. The obvious consequence of accepting their analyses, is the denial of reasons in ethics, the denial of any kind of moral argumentation whatsoever. But there is no longer any need to argue against their analyses, since such analyses are now matters of history. Almost all ethical theorists now recognize the existence of moral arguments. The questions that loom large now are the following: Whether moral reasoning can be described in terms of formal logic or does it possess a peculiar pattern of its

own? What exactly is the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of an ethical argument?

Studying the nature of the reasons that may be adduced in support of or against any ethical judgment, an attempt will be made in the present dissertation to find answers to these questions. I must hasten to add that the approach (in the work) being that of a student and not a system-builder, no effort will be made at formulating an entirely new theory regarding the nature of moral argumentation. In this sense it is a second-order inquiry - a talk about the talks about the nature of moral reasoning. The scope of the dissertation, therefore, will be confined to a critical examination of some of the representative theories in the field, namely, those of Stevenson, Toulmin, Hare and Baier. The motivation behind the choice of these particular thinkers has been the striking similarities and dissimilarities, in their theories, on crucial points.

Though a Positivist, Stevenson's views are significantly different from the general positivistic position. Along with the Positivists he regards moral judgments as emotive, but, does not deny the possibility of reasoning in ethics. Reasoning, in ethics, occurs whenever there is a need to resolve ethical disagreement, which involves, primarily, a disagreement in attitudes. A conclusion, an ethical judgment is inferred from factual premises in the course of moral reasoning - but,

the inference, for Stevenson, is not deductive. It is psychological, not logical. The analysis fails in so far as it fails to give an adequate criterion to distinguish between sound and unsound arguments, good and bad reasons.

The picture is not any better even in the case of those who regard the inference (in an ethical argument) as deductive in nature, namely, Hare and Baier. Hare adopts the Aristotelian syllogistic model (to explain the nature of moral reasoning) and Baier, a cognitivist unlike Hare, maintains that moral reasoning too is deductive. The major drawback in their views is that the element of decision, so crucial in moral reasoning, is left unexplained and unaccounted for, adequately. In formal or scientific arguments decision plays no part, thus enabling the premises to entail the conclusions of such arguments. It is different in case of ethical arguments.

Toulmin and Baier belong to the same school, but Toulmin stands nearer Stevenson on the issue of the deductivity of ethical arguments. For him, an ethical judgment is inferred from factual premises, but the inference is non-analytic, non-deductive.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first chapter briefly states the problem and cursorily surveys the various solutions offered. The second, third, fourth and fifth chapters contain critical analyses of the views of Stevenson, Toulmin, Hare and Baier, in that order. In the sixth chapter conclusions are drawn.

With regard to the theories of the thinkers under examination, the approach has been, always one of a sympathetic interpretation followed by criticism, centering mainly around their success (or failure) in explicating the logic of moral reasoning. The persistent question asked has been: Whether or not, the theory provides an adequate theory of moral decisions and justification?

The view that I put forward and defend, has close resemblance to that of Toulmin.

CHAPTER FIRST

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is a study of the logic of moral argumentation. Time and again ethicists have been confronted with the problem of explicating the nature of moral reasoning. Aristotle, perhaps, was the first to have given a serious thought to this subject. However, never before in the history of ethics has this topic inspired as much discussion as it has in the present century. A look into the metaethical literature of the last twentyfive or thirty years reveals the tremendous interest this topic has aroused amongst ethical theorists. The problem that has been worrying them is: Whether ethical reasoning can be described in terms of deductive or inductive logic, or, whether it is very different from both and has a mode of its own? How does one defend an ethical judgment when it is challenged? What is the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of an ethical argument? Another question closely connected to these is: Can an ethical judgment be deduced from non-ethical premises?

Aristotle conceived of moral reasoning as involving 'deliberation' - which is "about the things to be done by the agent himself."¹

1. Aristotle; *Ethics Nicomachea*; translated by W.D. Ross; Oxford University Press, 1915, 1112^a 30.

Deliberation, in his scheme, is required in order to determine how a certain end is to be achieved. He says;

. . . (they) assume the end and consider how and by what means it is to be attained; and if it seems to be produced by several means, they consider by which it is most easily and best produced; while if it is achieved by one only they consider how it will be achieved by this and by what means this will be achieved, till they come to the first cause, which in the order of discovery is last. . . . And if we come on an impossibility we give up the search. . . . But if a thing appears possible we try to do it. . . . The subject of investigation is sometimes the instruments, sometimes the use of them; and similarly in the other cases - sometimes the means, sometimes the mode of using it or the means of bringing it about.²

Deliberation consists of a series of practical syllogisms.

That is to say, moral reasoning, according to Aristotle, is syllogistic in character. The starting point in this series is the specification of a certain end, whereas the conclusion is an action to be done by the agent so as to realize the given end. The other premise of the syllogism provides a connecting link between the specified end and the action to be done. This connection is established in terms of the means - end relationship obtaining between the specified end or the major premise and, the conclusion or the action to be done. The practical syllogism as envisaged by Aristotle has, thus, only a limited application. It is confined to selecting adequate means for the attainment of a certain end. However, all ethical situations in which one has to make a choice and exercise one's decision are not of this sort. We deliberate not only in selecting a means to an end but also when we make decisions about the end. And the process of

2. Ibid., 1112^b 15-31.

choosing is not as simple and straight-forward as Aristotle seems to think.

Modern ethicists have become increasingly aware of the complexities involved in making a moral choice or decision. Consequently they have presented different, sometimes diametrically opposed theories about the nature of moral reasoning.

There is a group of philosophers led by Ayer, Carnap and some others who deny the legitimacy of what is called moral reasoning. Their analyses of moral language lead them to this conclusion. They maintain that ethical language is purely emotive. Ethical utterances, for them, are mere expressions of feelings and emotions, likes, dislikes, wishes, desires, exclamations etc. Their "analysis of knowledge has made a cognitive ethics impossible."³

However, the logical positivists are not concerned directly with ethical expressions. Their primary interest is to devise a criterion of cognitive meaningfulness of empirical statements. Non-cognitivism is, however, a consequence of their analysis of empirical statements. They seem to be thinking that since empirical statements are amenable to a criterion of significance to which ethical judgments are not, the latter cannot be said to have factual or cognitive meaning. Rather, they can at most have only emotive meaning. And, since truth value predicates are applicable only to analytic and

3. Hans Reichenbach; The Rise of Scientific Philosophy; University of California Press; 1951; p. 277.

empirical statements, ethical utterances cannot be regarded as either true or false.

Thus, they assign to moral predicates non-cognitive functions like those of expressing or evoking feelings, emotions, likes, dislikes, etc. They classify all meaningful expressions into (a) analytic, and (b) synthetic. It is obvious that ethical utterances are not analytic, since they are not tautologous. The only alternative left is to account for them in terms of syntheticity. But, ethical utterances, however, cannot be accommodated in the fold of synthetic (empirical) statements, since they do not satisfy their criterion of factual meaningfulness. An expression, in their schema, would be synthetic if and only if it is verifiable. An expression would be verifiable if and only if it describes an actual or possible empirical fact. Ethical expressions do not describe any such fact. Therefore, they cannot be regarded as expressing synthetic propositions. Consequently, they are not empirically verifiable, and therefore, cannot be either true or false.

The failure to account for ethical expressions in terms of the verifiability criterion, thus, leaves open to them only two alternatives, namely, either to deny any meaning-content to them and hold that they are meaningless, or to assign to them a kind of meaning different from factual meaning. The positivists choose the latter alternative, and regard moral predicates as having only emotive meaning. Ayer writes in his Language Truth and Logic:

The presence of an ethical symbol adds nothing to its factual content. Thus, if I say to someone, "You acted wrongly, in stealing that money," I am not stating anything more than if I had simply said, "You stole that money." In adding that this action is wrong, I am not making any further statement about it. I am simply evincing my moral disapproval of it. It is as if I had said, "You stole that money," in a peculiar tone of horror, or written it with the addition of some special exclamation marks. The tone or exclamation mark adds nothing to the literal meaning of the sentence. It merely serves to show that the expression of it is attended by certain feelings in the speaker.⁴

Almost all the early positivists have this approach to ethics. For them, ethical judgments, which are unverifiable, only pretend to be assertive. They attribute this pretension of ethical language to the grammatical structure of ethical utterances. It is because of their being in the indicative or declarative mood that people are misled to regarding them as propositions making empirical assertions, and, therefore, as true or false.⁵

If such an analysis of moral language is accepted, then obviously there cannot be, strictly speaking, reasons in ethics. In the positivists' scheme, "every attempt to persuade people that something is good (or bad)... depends upon the art of rousing feelings not upon an appeal to evidence."⁶ On such a view if two people differ about values, "there is not a disagreement as to any kind of truth, but a difference of taste."⁷

4. *Ibid.* p. 107.

5. Cf. Carnap; Philosophy and Logical Syntax; London Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd.; 1935; p. 35.

6. Bertrand Russell; Religion and Science; Oxford University Press; 1935 edition; p. 235.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 237-38.

There cannot be a legitimate argument about differences of taste. If the logical Positivists are asked to account for moral reasoning, they would do so on the lines on which they analyse ethical judgments. Ethical judgments are not actually factual, though they appear to be so. Similarly, moral arguments are not bonafide arguments. They are only apparently so.

However, such an extreme emotive theory about ethical language has become extinct. It is now mostly a matter of history. Modern analysts point out that even if ethical language is considered to be non-cognitive in character, this does not rule out the possibility of moral reasoning.

The present study, however, is not a study of ethical language. The question, whether ethical language is cognitive or non-cognitive though important, will not concern me here except in so far as it is relevant to the discussion of the nature of moral reasoning. Cognitivism, briefly stated, regards that the primary function of ethical expressions is to communicate information. Non-cognitivism, on the other hand, maintains that ethical utterances do not primarily communicate information. Rather, their primary function is to do something else, i. e., to evoke feelings and emotions; to prescribe something; or to persuade someone to do something etc. Theories of moral reasoning can also be classified and studied on the above pattern. If ethical utterances are regarded as factually informative, then ethical disagreement can be completely resolved by the use of factual reasons. Such a position, I shall call

cognitivist and its opposite non-cognitivist. According to the non-cognitivist theories, on the other hand, no amount of factual information can completely resolve ethical disagreement. The cognitivist theories can further be subdivided into, firstly, those theories which consider ethical reasoning as deductive in nature and, secondly, those which regard it as non-deductive. The non-cognitivist theories can also be subdivided in the same way. In what follows, I shall briefly present a rough survey of some important theories on this subject.

Intuitionists, for instance, do not doubt the cognitivity of moral language. They, however, think that basic moral principles cannot be proved to be either true or false. G. E. Moore, an intuitionist, holds that there are two kinds of moral judgments which are arrived at by giving answers to two different kinds of questions: (a) What kinds of things ought to exist for their own sake? and (b) What conduct is a good means of attaining something which ought to exist for its own sake? He says:

They (ethical judgments) either assert that this unique property (good) does always attach to the things in question; or else, they may assert only that the thing in question is a course or necessary condition for the existence of other things to which this unique property does attach.⁸

An ethical judgment about the things which ought to exist for their own sake cannot be proved or disproved. "It becomes plain," he writes, "that for answers to the first question, no relevant evidence whatever can be adduced,"⁹ in favour or against.

8. G.E. Moore; Principia Ethica; Cambridge University Press, 1903, reprint 1965, p. 21.

9. Principia Ethica, preface viii.

Judgments of intrinsic value, thus, cannot be proved to be true on the ground that they are given in some peculiar mode of cognition because any cognition is equally capable of providing true as well as false propositions. Such judgments are what he calls 'Intuitions.' Thus, on an intuitionist theory (of Moore's type) no reasoning is possible about judgments of this kind. However, one can argue about the truth or falsity of judgments which constitute answers to the second question, namely, 'what conduct is a good means of attaining something which ought to exist for its own sake?' Unfortunately, Moore has not talked in any detail about the nature of reasoning even with regard to judgments of this kind. From whatever he says in the preface of Principia Ethica it appears that he would accept a syllogistic model of reasoning in which the major premise would be a judgment of the first kind and the minor premise a proposition stating a causal truth about the consequence of the action in question. In other words, the minor premise provides a causal link between the major premise and the conclusion. He says:

. . . the kind of evidence, which is both necessary and alone relevant to such proof and disproof, is capable of exact definition. Such evidence must contain propositions of two kinds only: it must consist, in the first place, of truths, with regard to the results of the action in question of causal truths but it must also contain ethical truths of our first or self evident class.¹⁰

Furthermore, for Moore the primary concern in ethical reasoning is not to procure agreement, but the establishment of the truth or falsity of a judgment of the second type.

10. Ibid., p. viii - ix

There are certain other thinkers like Stephen Toulmin and Hampshire who study moral language from the stand point of 'good reasons'. They do not deny the logical relationship between a moral judgment and its supporting reasons but certainly reject the claim that moral reasoning is deductive. According to them moral reasoning has its own logic.

Non - cognitivists either deny that we can have logically genuine ethical arguments, or, hold that they are always liable to break down, since their validity depends upon the acceptance of a certain moral system. Any valid ethical argument is valid within the framework of a certain moral system of which the given argument constitutes a part.

Stevenson, for instance, contends that though moral reasoning is possible, it is entirely different from factual reasoning. Moral reasoning is not logical; it is psychological in character. The purpose of a factual argument is to establish the truth or falsity of a certain factual statement, whereas in the case of moral arguments the purpose is to procure agreement. Therefore, justifying a moral judgment, according to him, means succeeding in influencing the attitude of the opponent; hence any reason is a good reason to support a moral judgment, if it succeeds in influencing the attitude of the hearer. Stevenson's working models, formulated in Ethics and Language, express a particular view which he holds about the nature and purpose of moral judgment. It is his theory of moral language which leads him to deny the logical

character of moral reasoning. And, since there is no logical relation between a moral judgment and its supporting reasons, it is natural for him not to assign validity or invalidity to ethical arguments and truth and falsity to moral judgments. We shall, however, have occasion to return to him and discuss his views in detail in chapter second.

There are, as we said earlier, other non-cognitivists who do not deny the applicability of logical terms like 'true' and 'false' to moral judgments, and 'valid' and 'invalid' to moral arguments, but hold that in any moral argument, if it is to be valid, the use of certain general or universal moral principle as a premise, is necessary. When somebody passes a moral judgment, he assumes a general moral principle which 'entails' that judgment. Hare, for example, holds that in a genuine moral argument there is always an implicit general moral judgment figuring as the major premise. This, together with a true statement about the relevant non-moral characteristics of the case under consideration, which constitutes the minor premise, entails a moral judgment which occurs as the conclusion of the argument. This necessity of including a general moral principle as the major premise stems from his allegiance to the view that it is impossible to derive a moral judgment from purely non moral premises.

These thinkers who hold that an ethical judgment cannot be

logically inferred from factual premises invariably refer to Hume¹¹ for having shown the impossibility of inferring 'ought' statements from 'is' statements. Such an approach to moral reasoning assumes that if moral arguments are genuine, they must be deductive in form and that in every deductive argument, if it is to be valid, the relationship between the premises and the conclusion must be that of 'entailment'. In other words, the presence of the entailment relation between premises and conclusion is included in the very definition of a deductive argument. This seems to be the reason why two extreme standpoints are taken by non-cognitivists: that moral arguments are

11. The particular passage, from Hume's *Treatise*, referred to by such thinkers runs as follows:

In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remarked, that the author proceeds for sometime in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surprised to find that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is, and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an ought, or an ought not. This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the least consequence. For this ought or ought not, expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it should be observed and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be deduction from others, which are entirely different from it. But as authors do not commonly use this precaution, I shall presume to recommend it to the readers; and am persuaded that this small attention wou'd subvert all the vulgar systems of morality, and let us see, that the distinction of vice and virtue is not founded merely on the relations of objects nor is perceived by reason.

A Treatise of Human Nature. Book III, Part I, Section I,
(L. A. Selby - Bigge edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press) pp. 469-70.

not either logically genuine, or that a moral judgment is entailed by the premises of the argument of which it is the conclusion.

There are certain thinkers who argue that Hume has been misunderstood by modern thinkers in this respect. Professor McIntyre, for example, in his article "Hume on 'Is' and 'Ought'," (Philosophical Review, Vol. LXVIII 1959) tries to show that Hume is raising only a skeptical doubt as to how moral rules can be inferred from factual statements but never denies this. McIntyre goes to the extent of saying that in the rest of the Book III of the Treatise Hume tries to provide an answer to this very question. However, whether Hume has been correctly understood or not and, whether what McIntyre says is correct or incorrect is a different question. There is no doubt that this oft quoted passage from Hume has exerted considerable influence on modern writers. ¹²

For instance, Moore constructed an argument against the naturalists and accused them of committing the naturalistic fallacy. His argument was that good is a non-natural simple quality.

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12. Karl Popper writes, "Perhaps the simplest and most important point about ethics is purely logical. I mean the impossibility (Sic) no tautological ethical rules - imperatives; principles of policy; aims; or however we may describe them from statements of facts. Only if this fundamental logical position is realized can we begin to formulate the real problem of moral philosophy and to appreciate their difficulty." (Aristotelian Society Proceedings, Supp. Vol. XXII; 1948; p. 154). Professor Nowell-Smith, similarly, thinks that the inference from non-evaluative premises to evaluative conclusion "must be illegitimate reasoning, since the conclusion of an argument can contain nothing which is not in the premises, and there are non 'oughts' in the premises" (Ethics, London, 1954; p. 37).

Therefore, it cannot be defined in terms of natural properties; to do so is to commit the naturalistic fallacy. Moore's naturalistic fallacy is, in a way, a modified version of Hume's denial of the possibility of deriving 'ought' from 'is' statements. As Professor Prior sums up: "We have seen that the claim to infer significant ethical propositions from definitions of ethical terms, which appears to constitute the essence of what Professor Moore calls the naturalistic fallacy, is a special case of a more general fallacious claim, namely, the claim to deduce ethical propositions from ones which are admitted to be non-ethical."¹³

There are, however, some thinkers¹⁴ who try to controvert the claim that an evaluative judgment cannot be derived from non evaluative premises. Baier, for instance, builds up a whole system and tries to show not only that a moral judgment is derived from factual premises but insists that the relationship between the conclusion and premises in a moral argument is that of entailment.

13. A. N. Prior; Logic and the Basis of Ethics; Oxford: The Clarendon Press; 1949; p. 95.

14. See D. G. Brown's "Evaluative Inference" Philosophy, The Journal of Royal Institute of Philosophy (Vol. XXX No. 114, 1965). Also Max Black's, "The Gap between 'Is' and 'Should' "; Philosophical Review (Vol. LXXIII; 1964) and John R. Searle's "How to derive 'ought' from 'is' "; Phil. Review (Vol. LXXIII, 1964).

In the present dissertation, my concern is to study the nature of reasons which may be given for or against any ethical judgment. It is important in this connection to delimit the scope of the dissertation. First of all, I must admit that I make no attempt at formulating a new theory regarding the nature of moral argumentation. My approach here is that of a student and not of a system builder. In this sense, it is a second order enquiry - a talk about the talks about the nature of moral reasoning. I shall, therefore, confine myself to a critical examination of some of the important theories on the subject. I shall, in this connection, consider the views of Stevenson, Toulmin, Hare and Baier.

Stevenson belongs to the positivistic tradition, but his views are significantly different from the general positivistic position. He regards moral judgments as emotive in meaning but does not deny their significance as other positivists like Ayer and Carnap do. Consequently, he does not deny the possibility of reasoning in ethics but holds that it is non-logical. According to him a moral judgment is inferred from factual premises, but the inference is not logical but psychological. Stephen Toulmin, on the other hand, agrees with Stevenson that the nature of moral reasoning is not deductive, but disagrees with him when he says that a moral judgment can be logically inferred from factual premises. He rejects the adequacy of the deductive model to account for the nature of moral reasoning, yet he maintains that it is logical in character. Hare, though a

non-cognitivist like Stevenson, contends, on the contrary, that moral reasoning is not only deductive in nature but also that a moral judgment is "entailed" by the premises of an argument. He conforms to Hume's law that an evaluative judgment cannot be inferred from non evaluative premises. Hence, he holds that in an ethical argument the major premise is always a universal moral rule. His analysis of moral reasoning is very close to that of Aristotle. Contrary to Hare's analysis, Baier holds that a moral judgment is inferred from factual premises and the inference is strictly deductive. The relationship between premises and the conclusion in an ethical argument, according to him, is that of entailment.

In chapter second, third, fourth and fifth, I shall discuss the views of Stevenson, Toulmin, Hare and Baier respectively. In the concluding chapter, I shall try to formulate my own views. The thinkers selected for the present study are representative of the major trends in modern ethical thought in the last three decades. This does not, however, mean that I under-estimate the work of others. The main reason for selecting these thinkers is the striking similarities and dissimilarities on important issues in their views.

My approach would be, first to explicate and interpret their theories and then to assess how far they are successful in their attempt to explicate the logic of moral reasoning.

The need of reasoning in ethics arises either when one has to make a decision, or when one has to justify a decision. Reaching a decision and justifying a decision are not the same. The need of justification of a moral judgment arises when it is challenged. Thus, a demand for the justification of a moral judgment is the demand for showing the legitimacy of the grounds on which it has been made. Therefore, to determine whether or not the ethicists under consideration succeed in formulating an adequate account of moral reasoning, the main question with which I shall be concerned is: whether or not they provide an adequate theory of moral decisions and justification.

CHAPTER SECOND

The Persuasive Approach to Moral Argument:

Stevenson

In chapter first, it was mentioned that Stevenson regards the relationship between premises and conclusion in moral reasoning as psychological in character and not logical. His main contention is that the most important and fundamental function of an ethical utterance is emotive, that it expresses the attitude of the speaker and possesses an imperatival force to effect a desired change in the attitude of the hearer. Hence, whatever reasons are given in an ethical argument, they are expected to perform the function of altering the attitude of the hearer. Reasons do not directly effect a change in the attitude, instead they directly work on the hearer's beliefs and by effecting a change in the beliefs, they direct his attitude. It follows then that in a moral argument reasons are not directly related with the conclusion. When someone says, 'X is good', and offers R as a reason to support his judgment, the objective of R is neither to establish nor to abolish the descriptive content of the judgment. R is given to strengthen the emotive force of the judgment and hence to facilitate the evocation of the relevant attitude

in the hearer with regard to X. Hence any reason given in support of the judgment would be a good reason if it succeeds in arousing an appropriate attitude. This would mean that the relationship between an ethical judgment and its supporting reasons is different from the sort of relationship that holds between a non - evaluative statement and its supporting reasons. In the former the reasons are psychologically related to the conclusion, whereas in the latter they are logically related.

In Ethics and Language, (1944), his discussion centres mainly around two problems: (a) the meaning of ethical terms, and (b) the methods by which we support an ethical judgment. His views on the second are closely related with what he has to say regarding the first. Therefore it is important to review his theory of the meaning of ethical terms.

1. Nature of Ethical Disagreement:

Stevenson initiates the discussion with an analysis of ethical agreement and disagreement. He chooses this indirect way of approaching the problem because a correct understanding of the nature of ethical agreement and disagreement, he thinks, will enable us to, "obtain a general understanding of what constitutes a normative problem; and our study of terms and methods, which must explain how this kind of problem becomes articulate and how it is open to argument or inquiry, will properly be oriented."¹

1. Ethics and Language : (Yale University Press, 1944) p. 2

One of the most important distinctions in this connection is the distinction between agreement and disagreement in belief and in attitude. By disagreement in belief he means the kind of disagreement that occurs in science, history, or biography, where one person believes in a proposition 'p' and another in 'not-p', (or some other proposition which is incompatible with 'p'). In such a case the two are said to hold opposite beliefs. On the other hand, disagreement in attitude arises from the opposition of purposes, aspirations, preferences and desires, etc., entertained by the disagreeing parties. He defines disagreement in attitude as follows:

Two men will be said to disagree in attitude when they have opposed attitudes to the same subject - one approving of it, for instance, and the other disapproving of it - and when atleast one of them has a motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other.²

Hence, the distinction that Stevenson maintains between disagreement in belief and in attitude consists in the fact that in the former one is concerned with establishing or questioning the truth of a certain proposition, whereas in the latter one is concerned with how a thing in question is to be favoured or dis-favoured.

Disagreement in belief involves formal contradiction, whereas disagreement in attitude involves a psychological opposition between attitudes because an attitude for Stevenson is a, "Complicated

2. Ibid., p. 3.

conjunction of dispositional properties . . . marked by stimuli and responses which relate to hindering or assisting whatever it is that is called the "object" of the attitude."³

As regards the relationship between belief and attitude, Stevenson is of the view that it is always factual and never logical. One may disagree with somebody in belief without disagreeing in attitude. Attitudes accompanied by incompatible beliefs need not themselves be incompatible and vice-versa. One may disagree in attitude without disagreeing in belief. As for example, A and B might both believe that bull-fighting is a dangerous game, but A may have a favourable attitude towards it, and B an unfavourable one. This does not, however, mean that both of them are mutually exclusive:

It is by no means the case that every argument represents one sort of disagreement to the exclusion of the other. There is often disagreement of both sorts. This is to say little more than that our beliefs and attitudes must not be compartmentalized. Our attitudes, . . . , often affect our beliefs, not only by causing us to indulge in wishful thinking, but also by leading us to develop and check such beliefs as point out the means of getting what we want. And conversely, our beliefs often affect our attitudes; for we may alter our form of approval of something when we change our beliefs about its nature. The causal connection between beliefs and attitudes is usually not only intimate but reciprocal.⁴

Ethical disagreement is dual in character. It is the central feature of Stevenson's thesis that ethical agreement and disagreement

3. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

almost always involves agreement or disagreement, as the case may be, in attitude as well as in belief. "When ethical issues become controversial, they involve disagreement that is of dual nature. There is almost inevitably disagreement in belief, but there is also disagreement in attitude."⁵ Normally, our beliefs do have some bearing on our opinions concerning ethical issues. But it does not mean that ethical disagreement is exclusively due to disagreement in belief. Disagreement in belief must be accompanied by disagreement in attitude. In moral discourse a description of what is the case must be accompanied with "consideration of what is to be felt and done about it." Our beliefs influence our attitude. For Stevenson, as we shall see later, moral judgments are concerned with recommending something for "approval" or "disapproval". Recommending something for approval or disapproval does not involve description alone. To put it differently, ethical judgments, according to him, cannot be analysed solely in cognitive terms because of the additional emotive element that they possess. It is disagreement in attitude which constitutes the distinctive characteristic of moral disputes. It is disagreement in attitude, Stevenson holds that "chiefly distinguishes ethical issues from those of pure science."⁶

5. Ibid. p. 11.

6. Ibid. p. 7.

The "predominating" and "unifying" role that disagreement in attitude plays in a moral argument is two-fold.⁷ Firstly, a moral argument reaches its termination when agreement in attitude is reached. Since it is disagreement in attitude which originates ethical disagreement, ethical disagreement is resolved only when disagreement in attitude is resolved. Secondly, it determines what beliefs are to be regarded as relevant to the argument. Since a moral disagreement is resolved only by reaching an agreement in attitude, only those beliefs would be relevant which actually succeed or are likely to succeed in producing an agreement in attitude.

2. Meaning of Ethical-Terms:

Having given the general framework and principle source of ethical disagreement, Stevenson proceeds to analyse the meanings of ethical-terms and moral judgments. He first expounded his views on the topic in a series of articles published in Mind from 1937 to 1938 and later developed and elaborated them in Ethics and Language. Therefore in stating his views, I shall mostly refer to the latter.

He distinguishes between, broadly speaking, two sorts of functions which language performs. One uses language to record, to clarify and to communicate one's beliefs. One also uses language to give vent to one's feelings, emotions, attitudes, etc., or to

7. Cf. Stevenson; Facts and Values; Yale University Press: New Haven and London. 1963; pp. 4-5.

arouse similar ones in others and to stimulate them to behave and act in certain ways. The former is the descriptive function of language, the latter is the dynamic. These two functions are elaborated in his discussion of, what he calls, the descriptive and emotive meaning. The emotive meaning of an expression is the disposition, arising through its history, — "to give direct expression (quasi - interjectionally) to certain of the speaker's feelings or emotions or attitudes, and it is also a tendency to evoke (quasi - interjectionally) corresponding feelings, emotions or attitudes in those to whom the speaker's remarks are addressed."⁸

Thus when a certain word or phrase has a disposition to express or evoke a certain "range of emotions", it has emotive meaning. A word, or a phrase is said to have descriptive meaning if and only if it "strictly designates" a certain object. He explicates the meaning of "strictly designates" as follows: a sign S "strictly designates X, for Mr. A, if and only if S tends to strictly evoke in Mr. A a thought about X."⁹ And, in case S does not strictly designate X, rather causes a thought about X, S would be said to suggest X.

Thus, for Stevenson, a sign would have meaning for a person if it has a disposition to induce a stable pattern of responses in him. If the induced responses are cognitive in nature, then the sign has descriptive meaning; if they, on the other hand, constitute "a range of emotions" then the sign has emotive meaning. Both, 'Table'

8. Ibid., Footnote pp 21-22.

9. Ibid., p. 158.

and 'Hurrah', spoken in suitable situations, produce a certain range of responses in a hearer, depending upon his earlier training. Therefore, both of them have meaning for him in the above sense. But 'Table' causes a thought about table, hence, it has descriptive meaning; whereas, 'Hurrah' induces a sort of excitement in the hearer, hence, it has emotive meaning.

Now, since ethical terms do not 'strictly designate' anything, they cannot be defined solely in descriptive terms. Any definition of ethical terms which tends to define their meaning completely in descriptive words would suggest that disagreement in moral issues is exclusively due to disagreement in belief. In his "The emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms", Stevenson lays down three requirements which any definition of ethical terms must take into account.¹⁰

Firstly, goodness must be shown as capable of being a topic of disagreement; secondly, the definition must have the same 'magnetism' as the definiendum; and thirdly, goodness must not be discoverable solely through the scientific method. All these requirements, Stevenson thinks, can be satisfied only by treating ethical terms as emotive in function and not as purely descriptive. This, however, does not mean that Stevenson does not acknowledge any descriptive elements in ethical terms. In Ethics and Language he regards ethical terms as vague and ambiguous. Therefore, in spite of their possessing descriptive meaning as well, it is difficult to

10. Cf. Facts and Values; p. 15.

define them because of their vagueness. Ethical terms, according to him, have emotive meaning which is their predominant meaning and its relationship to their descriptive meaning is factual, and not logical.

In the "first pattern" analysis of ethical terms, he restricts the descriptive meaning of an ethical judgment to the attitude of the speaker. The judgment "This is good", approximately means "I approve of it; do so as well." The phrase, "I approve of it", describes the attitude of the speaker; whereas the phrase, "do so as well", has the imperative force to work on the hearer. So as to lead him to adopt a similar attitude towards the object. The emotive meaning of "good" cannot be defined because there is no emotive equivalent to it in language. In the "second-pattern", however, it is maintained that the descriptive meaning can be made so rich as to include any amount of descriptive content. He presents two patterns because of the fact that the descriptive meaning of ethical terms is both vague and ambiguous, and so, one and only one form of analysis is not possible. "The distinguishing feature of the second pattern", Stevenson remarks, "lies solely in the added descriptive meaning that it provides".¹¹

In the "second pattern", the ethical judgment, "This is good", for instance, is interpreted to mean 'This has the qualities or

11. Ethics and Language; p. 206.

relations X, Y, and Z...'; except that 'good' has a laudatory emotive meaning also, which permits it to express the speaker's approval, and tends to evoke the approval of the hearer.¹² However, it would be noted that the qualities or relations, 'X', 'Y', and 'Z', are not strictly designated by the ethical predicate 'good', rather they are only suggested.¹³

3. Working Models:

The general framework of both the patterns is outlined by the "working models". The working models are not "adequate" translations of respective moral-judgments. They provide only an approximate analysis, yet, he insists that, the "method of proving or supporting ethical judgments will be considered only to the extent that working models suggest them."¹⁴

The relation between "I approve of it" and "do so as well" is that of a conjunction. A conjunction of two or more conjuncts can be established only when each of the conjuncts is true. The descriptive expression "I approve of it", which states the speaker's attitude presents no difficulty. But, the imperative part, "do so as well", which is used to exert emotive or exhortative force in order to alter or direct the attitude of the hearer, cannot be proved true

12. Cf. Ethics and Language; p. 207.

13. Cf. Ethics and Language; p. 89.

14. Ibid. p. 20.

or false. But this part is very significant for an ethical disagreement as it mainly involves disagreement in attitude. It would be recalled that Stevenson, while defining disagreement in attitude, says that when two persons disagree in attitude, at least one of them has a motive to alter the attitude of the other. Altering or directing attitude in a discourse can be done by giving reasons in support. Hence, Stevenson argues that though we cannot give a proof for the expression "do so as well", we can give reasons in support. For example, if someone says 'Close the door', he can adduce certain reasons in support of the imperative, as for instance, 'Because it is very noisy out there'; or, 'It is very windy', etc. . These reasons are given to make the hearer behave in a certain way. However, it is important to note, as has been mentioned earlier, that these reasons have no logical relevance to the initial utterance of the speaker. They make a psychological appeal to the hearer. Since there is no logical relation between the two any reason is good if it succeeds in making the hearer do what the speaker wanted him to do.

4. Nature of Ethical Reasoning:

Now, having stated Stevenson's views regarding the nature of ethical disagreement and the meaning of ethical terms, we can elucidate his theory of ethical reasoning. According to him ethical reasoning comprises two methods which he calls "rational", and "non-rational". In what follows I shall present his views on them.

(A). Rational Methods:

In the rational method, reasons given in support of the judgment, "do not strictly imply the judgment in the way that axioms imply theorems; nor are they related to the judgment inductively, as statements describing observations are related to scientific laws. Rather they support the judgment in the way that reasons support imperatives. They serve to intensify and render more permanent influence upon attitudes."¹⁵ In explaining this central thesis, his main concern is to show that in an ethical argument, an ethical judgment E, and the set of its supporting reasons, R, are logically independent, i.e., the supporting reasons have no logical relevance to it. However, it does not mean that supporting reasons are not fact-stating. In both the patterns the supporting reasons have factual content, but they are given to alter or direct the attitude of the disputant.

Any statement about any matter of fact which any speaker considers likely to alter attitudes may be adduced as a reason for or against an ethical judgment. Whether this reason will in fact support or oppose the judgment will depend on whether the hearer believes it, and upon whether, if he does, it will actually make a difference to his attitudes; but it may conveniently be called a reason (though not necessarily a valid one) regardless of whether it is accepted or not.¹⁶

In certain cases of ethical-argument, supporting reasons, Stevenson admits, do have logical relevance to the judgment, and therefore, these arguments are amenable to logical rules.

15. Ibid, p. 113.

16. Ibid, pp. 114-15.

In such arguments, the disputants point out some inconsistency or contradiction in the utterances of each other. But in such cases also, the main purpose of giving reasons for or against is primarily the same as in those cases where reasons do not have logical relevance. That is, the reasons are given to influence the attitude of the hearer. Moreover, ethical arguments of this kind are rare and hence constitute an exception to Stevenson's general ethical methodology.

When an ethical judgment, is supported or attacked by reasons which are psychologically related to it, the truth of the initial utterance which describes the attitude of the speaker is not called into question. The supporting reasons are given to change the attitude or strengthen them by means of altering one's beliefs. Though generally the supporting reasons are of an empirical nature, capable of being shown "probable" or "improbable" by scientific method, they themselves do not make the judgment more probable or less probable "in the same sense". Due to this fact no definite method of proof is possible in ethics. Agreement in ethics can be obtained by giving reasons but only to the extent the reasons succeed in affecting attitude. Definitive method of proof is possible where supporting reasons are concerned with affecting agreement in belief. Since, in an ethical discourse supporting reasons are concerned with terminating disagreement in attitudes and do not possess the power of logical compulsion, ethical disagreement may continue even after all possible reasons have been given. Therefore, proving or

disproving an ethical judgment with finality is impossible.¹⁷

A change in the attitude may be caused by giving reasons of several sorts. In the first pattern methodology Stevenson lists a number of examples of the rational-method to illustrate the types of reasons which may be given to perform the function of altering attitudes. Firstly, one could do this by clarifying the nature of that which is being judged. At times disagreement originates from one party's not being clear about the nature of what is being judged. In such a case, though the reasons given in support of an ethical judgment appear to be about what is being disputed, they actually serve the purpose of clarifying the nature of the object concerned. When the nature of the object is stated clearly the way for agreement has been paved. Secondly, reasons that point out the consequences of what is being judged can also be given. The effect of the supporting reasons of this sort would, however, depend upon the hearer's attitude to these consequences. The dispute thus becomes a matter of weighing the consequences. Thirdly, a change in the attitude could be brought about by referring to the motive or by making an appeal to some relevant authority. However, in such a case agreement would again be attitude dependent, this time the attitude being the attitude of the opponent towards the authority referred to. If the opponent happens to have a favourable attitude towards the authority referred to, then the disagreement may be resolved, but if the

17. Cf. Ethics and Language, pp. 30-31; pp. 135-36.

opponent does not have a favourable attitude towards him, then the dispute will continue requiring further reasons to secure agreement.

It is not always that we try to resolve disagreement in attitude. At times, our main concern is "temporarily evading the force of the disconcerting influence, or altering the means by which it is exerted".¹⁸ The force of the disagreement is evaded by making a counter - attack on the speaker. If A, for example, tells B "You ought not to beat your wife"; B, instead of controverting it may retort by saying, "How about you, when you do it yourself?" Here, B makes the counter attack in order to silence A. Here, B is appealing to A's sense of equality in a rather embarrassing way: "Who are you to condemn in me that which you yourself do?" However, the success of a counter-attack "depends on whether the opponent is more anxious to escape the humiliation than to persist in his influence".¹⁹

In none of these cases are the supporting reasons completely isolated from the initial utterance. Stevenson says: "An ethical judgment is often supported by the systematic presentation of a whole body of beliefs, in which specific (factual) conclusions are subsumed under more general ones and each conclusion is weighed with regard to its probability."²⁰

The methods of resolving ethical disagreement as described above are employed in interpersonal ethical disputes. However,

18. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 128.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 129.

interpersonal ethical issues are not the only cases of ethical reasoning. There are occasions when a person is involved not in a dispute with some one else, but rather with himself - faced with a problem of convincing himself. Such situations arise when a person is not able to make up his mind in favour or against something. He is faced with his own conflicting attitudes. He suffers a state of indecision, and indecision is replaced by decision when the conflict between his own attitudes is resolved. Hence, it is important to discuss how personal conflicts are resolved.

According to Stevenson personal aspects are not very different from interpersonal ones because the factors present in the former are not completely different from those present in the latter.

The former involves conflict; whereas the latter, when they are controversial, involve disagreement in attitude. Conflict and disagreement are much the same, since conflict occurs when an individual disagrees in attitude with himself. So the personal aspects of ethics reveal the same opposition within an individual that has previously been seen within a group.²¹

Thus, when a person is faced with a situation where he has to make a decision, he is immediately concerned with making up his mind with regard to something. Therefore, his attitudes have a more "conspicuous" part to play here than his thoughts or beliefs have to play. So, the opposition, in both personal as well as interpersonal cases, issues from the same source. This conflict of attitudes is not devoid of cognitive content because when one is

21. *Ibid.* p. 131.

confronted with conflicting attitudes, "he is virtually forced to think - to recall to mind whether he knows about the alternatives before him, and to learn as much more about them as he can."²² But the relationship between his thoughts or beliefs and the decision arrived at, is psychological. As he further says, "For between his thoughts and attitudes, there is an intimate relationship. A change in his thoughts is likely to bring about a change in his attitude."²³ Thus, in personal decisions also reasons are "psychologically related to the judgment in which they eventuate. ... A reason which a man seeks for himself to change his own attitudes, will not be greatly different from one that he uses in arguing with a friend."²⁴

The relationship, thus, being psychological, the method of resolving opposition in personal conflict is, according to Stevenson, in principle the same as that used in the interpersonal case. For instance, if I have conflicting attitudes towards X and I discover that X causes Y, now my approval of X would depend on my attitude towards Y. If I approve of Y, it would strengthen my favourable attitude towards X and if I disapprove of Y my disapproval will weaken my favourable attitude if I had one, or will help the development of an unfavourable one. Y strengthens my approval not because of my belief in the

22. Stevenson, "The Emotive Conception of Ethics and Its Cognitive Implications"; Philosophical Review; (Vol. LIX Year 1950); p. 292.

23. *Ibid.* p. 292.

24. Ethics and Language; p. 131.

proposition that X causes Y; (belief has no power in itself to do this) but because of my attitude towards Y.

(B). Non-Rational Methods:

The non-rational method mainly consists in altering the attitude of the hearer without employing the intermediary steps of giving reasons which are related to beliefs. This is done by using sheer emotive or rhetoric force of words. In other words, the hearer is made to alter his attitude by means of the use of such words which have strong emotive meaning. It is the persuasive method of resolving disagreement in personal as well as interpersonal cases. Although, ethical judgments themselves are emotive, their emotive power is further intensified by using highly emotive expressions. Thus, for example, if someone says, "It is morally wrong to beat one's wife," and the other person opposes it, the force of his utterance can be intensified by telling the opponent that it is one's duty to treat one's wife gently and in the interest of his moral obligation he ought not to beat her. Here words like "ought", "obligation" and "duty" are not used to provide any farther knowledge, but to exert strong, cumulative, emotive effect on the attitude of the opponent. The persuasive method, thus, is not 'a 'reason-using' method as is the case with the rational method. The non-rational methods, Stevenson says, "go beyond the use of reasons altogether - always provided, of course, that the term

"reason" is to designate statements that express belief".²⁵ This does not, however, mean that Stevenson regards non-rational methods as completely isolated in their application from rational methods. Purely persuasive methods are seldom employed to secure agreement in attitude. Similarly, we do not use rational methods in isolation. Arguments which represent a mixture of both persuasive and rational methods are, on the other hand, quite commonly used.

Like rational methods, persuasive methods are employed to resolve disagreement not only in interpersonal cases but in personal ones as well. Persuasion, according to Stevenson, "is as ubiquitous as choice, and finds its place, as a kind of auto-suggestion, in almost all our personal deliberations".²⁶ The motive of self-persuasion is an urgency to make a decision. Purely rational methods are slow in their process to meet this urgency. Furthermore, "prolonged deliberation may fail to resolve the conflict, "or it "may only half-resolve the conflict " . The states of unresolved or half-resolved conflicts are "disquieting" and "half-paralysing" states of mind. In such cases what is required is an immediate decision in one way or the other. Hence, Stevenson argues, "We often hasten our decisions, supplementing or replacing rational methods by a vigorous self-exhortation - a kind of persuasion in soliloquy which shames certain impulses into quiescence, and gives to the others increased activity".²⁷

25. *Ibid.* p. 140.

26. *Ibid.* p. 148.

27. *Ibid.* p. 143.

From the above discussion it follows that non-rational methods, though they are employed in procuring agreement in personal as well as interpersonal cases, do not exemplify a form of reasoning. In fact, persuasion involves no reasoning at all. Since persuasion is not reasoning, the question of the criterion of validity for non-rational methods does not arise.

With regard to rational-methods, the problem of validity is very important because they exemplify a form of reasoning. Therefore, the issue we have to discuss with regard to them is, 'Is there any criterion of validity for ethical arguments?' 'Is there any rule to warrant the inference from a set of factual reasons to an ethical conclusion?' Let us begin, even at the cost of repetition, with a brief statement of the nature of ethical arguments. In Stevenson's words, "One of the peculiarities of ethical arguments lies in the inference from a factual reason to an ethical conclusion. The use of such a step does not exemplify persuasion, for persuasion is not mediated by articulate beliefs; and at the same time it does not exemplify any inductive or deductive procedure."²⁸ Now, since the transition, from the set of factual reasons *R* to an ethical conclusion *E*, is neither deductive nor inductive, the question whether such an inference can be called valid is of little interest to Stevenson. However, if an ethical argument is deductively

28. *Ibid.* p. 153.

modelled, which is rarely so, "the ordinary canons of validity remain in full operation."²⁹ But, in general, barring a few exceptional cases, the question of validity with regard to the rational method is, for Stevenson, irrelevant. The inference from R to E "does not exemplify any inductive or deductive procedure," hence, "the inference will be neither demonstratively nor inductively valid."³⁰ When the inference from R to E does not purport to comply with the rules of deductive or inductive logic, the question of its validity is uncalled for. The point that Stevenson is emphasizing is that the notion of validity is peculiar to deductive and inductive arguments, and since ethical arguments fall in neither category, the notion of validity ceases to apply to them.

Stevenson admits that the term "validity" is vague and can be defined in more than one way. He also sees the possibility of a definition in which the inference from R to E could be called valid. But he rejects this possibility as "impracticable" and "injudicious". He says:

No matter how else we define "valid", we shall very likely want to retain a sense which is intimately related to "true". The precise way in which the terms are so related, and precise meaning of them both, may occasion no little perplexity; but we shall in any case want to say that a "valid" method is more conducive to establishing truths, or probable truths, than any "invalid" one. . . . But if "valid" is to be applied to the step from, R to E, then . . . the word ("valid") could not have its accustomed connection with "true". . . . In the interest of clarity, then, it will be expedient to deny the word ("valid") any application to the ethical cases in question.³¹

29. Ibid. p. 152.

30. Ibid. p. 153.

31. Ibid. p. 154.

The reason why "valid", when applied to the inference from R to E, is deprived of its normal connection with "true" is not that ethical judgments cannot be said to be 'true' or 'false', but because the factual reasons in an ethical argument "donot establish or call into question the truth of the ethical judgment's (descriptive) meaning."³² Thus, though, Stevenson admits of the application of "validity" to those (rare) ethical arguments which are wholly concerned with establishing beliefs, but those (which include the majority of them) which are not concerned with establishing beliefs but use them to alter attitudes, cannot be called valid or invalid.

Stevenson distinguishes between the "idiomatic" and the "formal" or scientific use of "true". "True" used in the idiomatic sense means assenting to the utterance concerned. For example, A says, "X is good"; and B replies, "Yes, that is true." Here B's use of 'true' expresses his assent to A's judgment. It expresses his agreement with what A has said. But, this agreement is not in belief; it is agreement in attitude. It is in this sense that ethical judgments are at times called 'true' or 'false.' But this sense of 'true' is quite foreign to science. Therefore, it is not a sense that can be related to the terms 'valid' and 'invalid' as used in logic. One can, however, derive a criterion of 'validity' applicable to ethical arguments keeping in mind the idiomatic sense of 'true'; but this criterion would again be very different from the one accepted in deductive or inductive logic.

32. Ibid, p. 154.

5. Critical Appraisal:

In the previous section we discussed Stevenson's thesis that we cannot, technically speaking, raise the question of the validity of the inference from a set of reasons to an ethical conclusion. It is important to note that Stevenson is not content with saying only that, since ethical arguments are neither deductive nor inductive in nature, the criteria of validity as used in deductive or inductive logic are inapplicable to them. He makes a stronger claim that in no logically appropriate sense ethical arguments can be regarded as valid or invalid. To ask whether the inference in an ethical argument is valid or not is, for Stevenson, nonsense. However, any theory which aims at explicating the pattern of reasoning, whether scientific or ethical, must also provide an adequate criterion to distinguish between sound and unsound arguments and good and bad reasons. It is an essential requirement for any theory of reasoning. Reasoning is a rational process exhibited in argumentation. Every argument shows a passage from a set of reasons to a conclusion. This passage, or inference exemplifies a movement of the mind to a new proposition, i.e., conclusion, from a given set of propositions or reasons. It is neither irrelevant nor nonsense to ask, in this connection, whether such a movement is justified or not. But to ask this amounts to asking whether the inference which exemplifies this movement is justified or not. Whether or not there are good reasons in support of the conclusion. This can be ascertained only if we have a criterion for good reason. Therefore,

the crucial question with regard to Stevenson's thesis is whether or not it provides an adequate criterion to this effect.

A point of clarification: The question regarding the good reason criterion is being raised only with regard to what Stevenson calls rational methods. So far as the persuasive or non-rational method is concerned, this question is irrelevant, because it makes sense to say, 'This is a good reason', or 'This is a sound argument', but not (using 'good' and 'sound' in the above sense), 'This is good persuasion', or 'This is a sound persuasion'. The persuasive method does not really involve any kind of reasoning. The utterances given to favour or oppose the judgment do not actually provide reasons but emotively charged explanations. The rational methods, on the contrary, consist of inferences from factual reasons R to ethical conclusion E.

Nowhere in his account of the rational methods, either in the account of the first pattern or the second pattern methodology, has Stevenson talked of a good reason criterion. On the contrary he seems to deny the distinction between good and bad reasons in the field of ethical argumentation. But if ethical reasoning, as any other kind of reasoning, is to be conceived as a rational process, then it must be possible to distinguish, on certain specific grounds, between arguments which are sound and those which are not sound, between reasons which are good and those which are not good. Unless there exists a criterion to this effect, it is not only difficult but impossible to reason successfully

about any matter whatsoever, ethical or non ethical.

According to Stevenson, when two persons, say A and B disagree in their attitudes about X, then atleast one of them has a motive to call into question the attitude of the other and is prepared to alter it by giving factual reasons which are expected to bring about a change in the attitude. Stevenson contends that, "A uses R in the hope of changing the attitude which B's initial utterance truthfully described, and to defend himself from having to change the attitude which his own initial utterance truthfully described."²⁶ But human beings are not so computerized that as soon as a certain statement is fed into them, a desired change in their attitude is brought about.

A, in order to succeed in altering the attitude of B, has to give a sound argument which could be effective for his purpose. Any statement cannot be used as a reason. Stevenson, himself, would not accept that A can use any statement of fact as a reason for X. For him only those reasons which actually succeed or are likely to succeed in procuring agreement in attitude would be relevant to the judgment.²⁷

The point of the issue involved here is that if there is no criterion for determining good reasons in ethics, in what way can argumentation lead to agreement in attitude? According to Stevenson's method, when A says, "X is good"; and B says, "No, it is bad", they are not contradicting each other; rather they are simply expressing

26. Ibid, p. 167.

27. Cf. Facts and Values, pp. 4-5.

their respective attitudes about X. The subsequent utterances given in favour or against X are concerned with defending the speaker's attitude and altering the attitude of the hearer. But, if A and B are concerned only with this in their arguments without there being a good reason criterion, not only will it be difficult to say whether they are arguing rationally or irrationally, but for them to have agreement in attitude will become almost impossible. For, A, knowing that B is only defending his attitude and trying to alter his (A's) attitude, would try to block B's attempt in this direction. Similarly, B in turn, knowing that A is concerned only with changing his (B's) attitude and defending himself from having to alter his own would also do the same. The agreement becomes a matter of how much submissive or stubborn A or B can be in respect of psychological influences exerted on them. Both, A and B, may become indifferent as to whether reasons offered for or against X are rational or irrational; justifiable or unjustifiable; good or bad. The disagreement, thus becomes, a likely source of a deliberate refusal to agree.

It is to be noted that Stevenson, while discussing the rational method, is not prescribing how people should argue but is describing how people do resolve their ethical disagreements by means of reasons. But in ethical argumentation, too people make a distinction between rational and irrational arguments, and good and bad reasons. It is not uncommon to hear, when two persons are arguing about some ethical

matter, one of them saying, "you are irrational," or "you are becoming unreasonable." But if there were no criterion on the basis of which one could tell whether a reason is good or not, the utterance of such a sentence will be pointless. But we do utter such utterances and they do have a point. Therefore Stevenson's method must offer some criterion or criteria for good reasons, so as to be a faithful description of ethical reasoning.

It seems that though Stevenson does not clearly state such a criterion, we can reconstruct it, from his account of the rational methods and the relationship between belief and attitude, in terms of the notion of relevant reasons. This criterion will be in terms of the effectiveness of the reasons concerned. Reasons which modify the attitude of the hearer would be regarded as good reasons. Those which succeed in procuring agreement in attitude would be good, and those which do not would be bad. But this criterion does not help us because the notion of a good reason is different from that of an effective reason. At times even an odd reason becomes quite effective in convincing a person for doing something. Furthermore, a reason may be effective in case of one person, but at the same time may not be so for another participating in the same situation. For suppose there are three persons A, B and C who are in disagreement in their attitude about X. A holds that X is good; and B and C hold that X is bad. A offers certain reasons P, Q, R, in support of his

judgment about X. It is quite possible that A succeeds in altering the attitude of B about X; and this resolves the disagreement with B. But A and C still disagree in their attitudes. Now, applying the criterion stated above, P, Q, R given by A in support of his judgment about X would be good for B, since they succeed in procuring his agreement, but this would not be so in case of C, because of their failure to effect an agreement with C. That is to say, the same set of reasons would be good for one person and bad for another, though both B and C possess the same factual information about X. But a reason cannot be both good and bad at the same time in the same situation. If anything is a good reason, it is not so at a certain time for a certain group. The criterion formulated in terms effectiveness, thus, breaks down.

CHAPTER THIRD

The 'Good Reason' Approach to Moral Argument (I):

Toulmin

In the first chapter we remarked that in recent years there has developed a new approach to moral philosophy which registers its departure from the traditional approaches. Its prime interest is not in the definitions of ethical-predicates, rather it is in the study of the role of reasons in moral discourse. However, the new approach has its analytic moorings and has emerged from within the analytic philosophy under the influence of the later Wittgenstein. According to the thinkers of this orientation, since language has no single function to perform, instead, it is multi-functional, the aim of linguistic analysis is to determine the various uses of language in varying contexts. The expressions of ordinary language are not meaningless, nor are they without point. Our ordinary language is an adequate and efficient medium of communication. If it is used properly, it is not misleading. It is only when a philosopher does not take into account the multiplicity of contexts in which language is employed that it seems misleading. Therefore, an analysis of ethical language, if it is to be useful, must take into

account the varying contexts in which ethical language is used. A correct perspective of ethical language cannot be achieved if we begin our analysis with an enquiry into the meanings of ethical terms. It is when we ask questions like, 'What is good?'; 'What does goodness consist in?' etc., that we loose grip over the problem and construe inadequate and improper models of the analysis of ethical terms. The proper task of moral philosophy is not the analysis of meaning, according to some of these thinkers, but the study of the reasons which support or oppose a moral judgment. Thus, the primary question, according to the new approach is 'What is that which can function as a reason in support of an ethical judgment?'

Stephen Toulmin and Kurt Baier have presented a full length discussion of the method by which we can determine the sorts of reasons which can be used in support of a judgment, reasons which can be regarded as the best reasons. In the present chapter, we shall study Toulmin's discussion in this regard, contained in The Place of Reason in Ethics.

1. Rejection of the Traditional Approaches:

Toulmin begins his discussion with bidding 'goodbye' to the traditional value theories, and it would be helpful to go through his criticism of the traditional approaches to understand his own methodology. He classifies the traditional approaches into three groups,

objective, subjective and imperative. One of the most crucial objections he raises against all of them is that they do not provide an adequate account of what is a good reason in Ethics. They fail to explain the method which is actually used in moral - reasoning. Since Toulmin holds that the purpose of an ethical theory is to expound the pattern of valid moral reasoning, if any ethical theory fails to satisfy this requirement, that theory must finally be rejected, even if it were to perform well certain other functions.

The objective approach, which considers value-predicates as referring to certain objective properties, reduces ethical disagreement to a mere matter of using words differently. Ethical-predicates, however, are not property-words. They give the impression of being property-words because of the way they appear in an ethical discourse. If ethical-predicates were really property-words, then the disagreement would most generally arise because of our not knowing the correct use of these words. This would be a linguistic difficulty. Though it is not trivial, it is not serious enough to give rise to a genuine ethical disagreement. The disagreements in ethics are not verbal. They arise because of the reasons given for doing one thing and not another. To think that, "if one man attributes the predicate 'X' to anything, and the other withholds it, they cannot be contradicting one another unless 'X' stands at least

for a property", is according to Toulmin, a fallacy.¹ In an ethical disagreement what one needs "to contradict one another . . . are the reasons for doing this rather than that or the other."²

Similarly, while discussing the subjective approach, Toulmin concentrates mainly on the Stevensonian methodology. He thinks that Stevenson's account of moral-reasoning does not provide any insight into the subject, for, a similar account of reasoning in psychological terms about what goes on in arguments other than ethical can also be given. But we are not interested in the psychological aspect of moral-reasoning. It might be of interest to others but not to an ethicist, since it is not his aim in constructing an ethical theory. He writes:

What we want to know is in which of these discussions the arguments presented were worthy of acceptance, and the reasons given good reasons, in which of them persuasion was achieved at least in part by valid-reasoning, and in which agreement was by means of mere persuasion - fine rhetoric unsupported by valid arguments or good reasons. And it is over the criteria (or rather, the complete lack of criteria) given for the validity of ethical arguments that the most telling objections to this (and any) subjective theory arise.³

The criteria of validity in moral reasoning cannot be explained in terms of the effectiveness or otherwise of the reasons used. The subjectivists point out that the question of valid inference in moral-reasoning is 'devoid of interest' because "validity" of a moral-argument consists in "selecting those inferences to which you are psychologically

1. Toulmin, The Place of Reason in Ethics; Cambridge, at the University Press; 1950; p. 28.

2. Ibid; p. 28.

3. Ibid; p. 38.

disposed to give assent."⁴ It is possible that a valid ethical inference may coincide with our being psychologically disposed to give assent to it, yet these are logically distinct notions. The point that Toulmin tries to bring home is that in ethical-reasoning too the question of validity or invalidity arises as much as in reasoning about matters of fact. In saying that something is good we might be expressing our approval and also trying to change the attitude of our hearer, but we are not simply doing that; rather we are also saying that there is a good reason for saying that it is good and hence we are approving of it. Thus, any subjective theory which explains the criterion of validity in psychological terms, relating it to the speaker's likes, feelings, dispositions, attitude, etc., and responses of the hearer, "must fail at this point."⁵

The basic doctrine of the imperative approach is that the meaning of ethical predicates is purely emotive. In saying that something is good or right one is only displaying one's wishes and feelings towards that which is judged. The question, 'what is a good reason in Ethics?', is completely dismissed as being "nonsense". For an imperativist, when two persons disagree about a certain moral issue, neither do they express contradictory propositions about some objective property, nor do they express divergent reactions to the object by expressing contradictory or incompatible attitudes;

4. Ibid. p. 39.

5. Ibid. p. 39.

rather, both of them are merely expressing their different emotions, and there is nothing for them to disagree about. They merely express different wishes.

The major flaw in this approach consists, as Toulmin sees, in that it blurs the distinction between contingent and necessary propositions. It seems to identify the contingent proposition, — 'In ethical-discourse the question of truth and falsity does not often arise.', with the necessary proposition — 'In ethical discourse, the question of truth and falsity cannot arise'. That is to say, . . . "it treats ethical statements which approximate in some respects to commands and interjections, as if they were just commands and interjections."⁶ This mistaken identification leads them to conclude that "evaluative inference" is beyond the scope of reasoning.

A close look at Toulmin's rejection of the traditional approaches reveals that his main charge against the traditional approaches is that they have under-emphasized or completely ignored the importance of "reason" in a moral-discourse. The objectivist seems to be thinking that if people are factually well-informed, they must agree about every ethical issue; whereas the subjectivist seems to regard that different people must have different standards of values. The imperativist, on the contrary, rules out even the possibility of a genuine moral disagreement and, consequently, of moral argument.

6. Ibid. p. 53.

Toulmin comments that each approach, "misrepresents our ethical concepts in a way which cannot be ignored and in each case, being in a false position to start with, the theorist spends the greater part of his time trying to redeem his initial failure by ad-hoc modifications — one explaining that he is concerned with non-natural properties; another insisting that he is discussing attitudes not just feelings; a third talking of the interplay of our feelings."⁷

2. Nature of Reasoning:

Probably the most important reason why the traditional approaches could not depict the correct methodology of moral reasoning has been their failure to recognize the crucial point that reasoning of any kind is always context - dependent, and therefore no singular pattern of reasoning can be evolved in which any valid reasoning must fit. In different branches of knowledge different patterns of reasoning are employed. Toulmin stresses that the "dialectical-pattern" of "reasoned arguments" is so wide that there is no single criterion for distinguishing good from bad reasoning. Each variety of reasoning uses its own criterion whereby it can determine which reason is a good reason and which one is bad, which argument is valid and which is invalid. One will have to examine every individual mode of reasoning and even every type of sentence in order to ascertain their logical criterion and purpose. It is a mistake, therefore, to limit the scope of reasoning to certain specific branches of knowledge

7. Ibid. pp. 61-62.

like mathematics and science. The uses of speech are multi-purpose and multi-functional; hence, no claim to the effect that only some specific purposes of speech come within the domain of knowledge and not others is legitimate. All that can be said about the general nature of reasoning is that its purpose is to present an argument in such a way that the conclusion is shown to be "worthy" of acceptance, or "credence", or "worthy of belief". And, the criterion for judging whether the conclusion is worthy of acceptance or worthy of belief would depend upon the purpose of the argument of which it is the conclusion.

The main reason why the subjectivists and the imperativists fail to account for "good reasons" in ethics is their mistaken identification of science with reason and of ethics with "rhetoric" or "rationalization". But the mode of reasoning in science is different from that used in ethics. And, the difference consists in their respective functions. Thus in order to study the mode of reasoning employed in ethics, one would have to begin with the function of ethics.

3. Reason in Ethics:

Ethics is concerned, Toulmin tells us, with altering one's feelings and behaviour; and, therefore, ethical arguments are 'disguised to influence' our behaviour. Thus, he says, "the key to the logic of ethical arguments and sentences is to be found in the way in which we come to allow reasons to affect our choice of action."⁸

8. Ibid. p. 131.

Our main task at the moment, is to answer the question, "How is it that we come to let reasoning affect our choice?" This question can be interpreted and consequently answered in a number of ways. One possible way is to view the problem from the point of view of history by giving a description of the course of events which have led to the present stage. This would be a sort of record of various kinds of moral codes prevalent in different societies at different times. This kind of approach, though significant on account of its own merit, is not of interest to us for the present purpose. Our interest is not in the history of the process of the interaction of moral reasoning and moral choice, rather it is in the very process of interaction. Our question could also be taken in the psychological sense as the demand for a description of the development of mind's power to perform moral reasoning. This would again be a recording of history, though not of physical events, but of events of another sort, and, therefore, not of much help to us. A third possible way is to treat the question from the logical perspective as calling for an enquiry as to how ethical reasoning must be defined so as to retain its role of influencing our behaviour. Toulmin adopts this approach, and, if this demand is met, he thinks, it would help us in solving the problem of ethical justification.

While discussing the notion of 'Duty'⁹, he demonstrates the process by which generally people take decisions with regard to their

9. Ibid. p. 132.

actions. In what follows I shall try to briefly summarize his position.

Suppose that two persons A and B are arguing whether A should do X or Y. A thinks X is the right thing to do; whereas B considers Y as the right action. In the process of argument they come to agree that neither X is morally right, nor is Y, instead the morally right action for A, under the circumstances, is Z. Their argument would mainly be guided by two types of moral considerations. Firstly, that doing of Z would fulfil a duty which constitutes a part of the moral code to which both A and B belong, and that X and Y are incompatible in this part of the system. Secondly, if either X is done or if Y is done they would cause suffering and inconvenience to the community A and B belong to, whereas Z would not result in either suffering or inconvenience to other members of the community. The second type of consideration shows that ethics alters one's feelings and behaviour so as to adjust our behaviour with the requirements of other members of our community.

The above example shows that the notion of duty plays an important role in moral reasoning. It is because, for Toulmin, the concept of duty is the spinal cord of social or community life. If people were not aware of the idea of duty, there would not, probably, be any need of moral reasoning. Ethics, whose function is to "correlate our feelings and behaviour in such a way as to make the

fulfilment of everyone's aims and desires as far as possible, compatible"¹⁰ constitutes a part of the process which seeks to harmonise the desires and actions of all the members of a community. This function is performed by controlling the behaviour of a community. The need of controlled behaviour arises in order to ensure regards for one another's interest. Thus, the second consideration in the above example that doing Z would not lead to the sufferings of others, whereas X and Y would, is a consequence of a larger consideration, viz., that of preventing avoidable sufferings. This kind of consideration, whether implicit or explicit, is basic in ethical reasoning because of its direct relation with the function Toulmin assigns to ethics. The first consideration that doing Z would be in accordance with a certain accepted social norm of the society A and B belong to refers to a certain conventional duty. The social norms are accepted because they are found conducive to a state of general well-being of the society. Both of the above mentioned considerations are taken care of at different levels of moral reasoning.

4. Ethical Justification:

With this background in mind it would be easier to appreciate what Toulmin has to say about ethical justification. Whenever a particular act involving a certain moral issue is questioned, its justification is given by bringing in the first kind of consideration,

10. Ibid., p. 137.

i. e., by relating it to a certain moral principle accepted in the society. Thus, for example, to outline the structure of an ethical argument, suppose that A has promised to return a certain book to B and hence tells C, "I ought to return this book to B", and C questions, "why ought you to return it?". Here C is demanding a justification from A. A, under the circumstances, would say, "Because I have promised to let him have it to-day." If C further questions, A would again say, "Because I have promised, and I ought to do what I promise anyone to do." If C still insists for a reason, A can state the moral principle "everyone ought to do what he promises to do." That is all. No further justification is possible for A's proposed act.

Whenever we make a moral decision where there is no conflict of duties involved, we consider the relevant facts involved in performing the act in question; and in doing so, we pass from factual reasons to an ethical conclusion. The kind of reasons which facilitate such an inference are those which relate the action in question to an accepted social practice. Thus, the justification of a moral act consists in showing that the action in question is in accordance with some social practice.

The above example is applicable only in cases where the situation permits a straightforward method of justifying an action. But situations are not always so simple. Many a time the facts of the

situation are such that this method becomes more or less inapplicable. At times we undergo a mental tug of war in deciding whether to do this or that. This happens when one is faced with two or more conflicting moral claims. In such situations appeal to any single principle would not help us resolve the problem. One has to estimate the relative consequences of each claim and one decides in favour of the action which involves greater risks as compared to others, if it is left undone. There is no single logical criterion or moral principle which can be replaced for "estimation" or "weighing" of the consequences, because of the variety of the situations one may be confronted with. In absence of such a criterion, the task of assessing the consequences becomes difficult and complicated. Toulmin writes:

. . . in many cases (we) justify an individual action by reference to its estimated consequences. Such a reference is no substitute for a principle where any principle is at issue; but moral reasoning is so complex and has to cover such a variety of situations that no one logical test (such as appeal to an accepted principle) can be expected to meet every case.¹¹

Justification of particular acts by appeal to a moral principle, as elucidated above, is done at, what Toulmin calls, the "primitive stage" in the development of ethics, where "morality boils down to the doing of the done things." At this stage ethics is "deontological" in character. Here, the highest courts of appeal are social practices, customs, moral codes prevalent in society. One appeals to a certain

11. Ibid. p. 148.

moral principle in justifying an act as a scientist appeals to a certain law while explaining a certain phenomenon. The scientific laws as well as the moral principles, in Toulmin's phraseology, are "short-hand summaries of experience." When a scientist explains certain experiences by reference to a certain scientific law he relates the experience to be explained to the past experience and observation of similar experiences and relevant experiments. The laws used in the scientific explanations are the condensed formulations of past experience. Similarly, in ethics, when one questions the rightness of a certain act, one justifies that by reference to a certain moral principle which embodies a history.

At the primitive stage moral principles and social customs are accepted dogmatically. But with the development of new, increasingly complex situations, people develop a critical attitude. They question the rightness not only of particular acts but also of social customs and prevalent moral principles. More than the supreme, unquestioned authority of social rules, what matters are the consequences of following certain social rules which have been accepted uncritically in the primitive stage. Thus, the deontological character of morality is replaced by the "teleological" character. However, this change from deontological to teleological stage is not complete. The change mainly consists in making the inflexible moral code flexible. It becomes a sort of developing code.

Now, when questions are asked regarding the rightness of a particular act, one gives reasons to relate the action in question to a certain moral principle. Mr. A ought to return the book to B, because he has promised B to do the same. No more general reason can be given in support, "so long as one confines oneself to a particular moral code, no more general 'reason' can be given for an action than one which relates it to a practice (or principle) within that code."¹² That is to say, one conforms to an existing social or moral pattern, and reasons are given from within that pattern. One cannot go on questioning any further. As in the case of a scientific theory, one can ask significant questions which fall within the framework of that theory. One can ask an astronomer who discusses light rays in outer-space in non-euclidian terms, "Are light-rays really straight?", but his criterion of straightness can not be questioned. Similarly, "within the framework of a particular moral code, one can ask of most individual actions, 'Is this really right?', but the standards of rightness cannot be questioned."¹³ To question the rightness of the standard or criterion itself is to go outside the moral code.

The mode of reasoning in which one questions the rightness of a principle or criterion itself is, thus, different from the mode of reasoning adopted in the earlier case. Here, one does not demand

12. Ibid. p. 148.

13. Ibid. p. 149.

justification of particular acts; rather one begins examining a social practice or custom. One does not question the propriety of one's returning a book one has promised to return; rather, one questions the propriety of promise-keeping. Questions pertaining to the second variety are decided by estimating the probable consequences of (a) retaining the practice, and (b) of adopting the suggested practice. Thus, the question whether promises ought to be kept would be answered by estimating the probable consequences of both the alternatives, i.e., of fulfilling and breaking promises, and, decide in favour of the one which satisfies the function of ethics. That is, from amongst the likely alternatives, the alternative which is expected to yield the best result would be accepted.¹⁴

But at times one does not, while questioning a social practice, question just the practice; rather, with the practice the entire way of life in the society is questioned. In such cases, two alternative ways of life are compared, and the choice of any one particular alternative is arbitrary. Which way of life, the muslim or christian, is better? One has to compare both the alternative patterns of societies and the final decision reached would be a personal decision. "There is no magic wand", as Toulmin says, "which will turn the English social system into a muslim one overnight: the only practical use for the question, "which way of life is better?" is in service of personal decision - for example, whether to remain here in our society, such

14. Ibid. pp. 149-50.

as it is or to go and live as an Arab tribesman in the desert."¹⁵

Thus, to answer the main question, "What kinds of reasons are good in Ethics"?, the description of Toulmin's analysis of moral reasoning suggests that in case where individual actions are concerned, those reasons which show that the action in question is an instance of a social rule or principle, are good reasons; and, in case a social rule is brought under examination, those reasons which show that the acceptance or rejection of the rule will bring happy or unhappy results, are good reasons. However, one point must be taken care of. The reasons given in support of an ethical judgment are not themselves ethical. Rather, they state ethically neutral facts and from these ethically neutral facts we pass over to an ethical conclusion. Toulmin makes it clear that, ". . . 'This practice would involve the least conflict of interests attainable under the circumstances' does not mean the same as 'This would be the right practice'; nor does 'This way of life would be more harmoniously satisfying' mean the same as 'This would be better'. But in each case, the first statement is a good reason for the second: the 'ethically neutral' fact is a good reason for the 'gerundive' moral judgment. If the adoption of the practice would genuinely reduce conflicts of interest, it is a practice worthy of adoption, and if the way of life would genuinely lead to deeper and consistent happiness, it is one worthy of pursuit."¹⁶ The mapping

15. Ibid. p. 153.

16. Ibid. p. 224.

of moral reasoning is thus complete, requiring no other general criterion. He writes:

I myself do not feel the need for any general answer to the question, "what makes some ethical reasoning "good" and some ethical arguments "valid"? Answers applicable to particular types of arguments are enough. In fact, it seems to me that the demand for any such general answer (however it is to be obtained) must lead one to paradoxes as surely as did the corresponding demand over science. For either such a general answer, will in particular cases be equivalent to the rules which we have found or it will contradict them.¹⁷

5. The Scope of Ethical Reasoning:

The boundaries of moral reasoning are thus limited. The principle of least suffering, or preventing avoidable sufferings to other members of the community, which according to Toulmin, is the fundamental criterion for the justification of moral appraisals, delimits the scope of reasoning. Ethics as a whole cannot be justified, nor is there any need to do so.¹⁸

The point that Toulmin wants to convey is that the chain of ethical reasoning is finite. There is no need of justification for the question, "Why should I do what is right?" or "Why should I be moral?". Such questions are, Toulmin argues, 'limiting questions' in the sense that no 'literal answer' can be given to these questions. Any attempted justification would not be rational, for there is no scope for such questions within the mode of ethical reasoning. Therefore, attempted answers would be really, "mythical", "spiritual" or "figurative".¹⁹

17. Ibid., p. 161.

18. Cf. Reason in Ethics, pp. 162-63.

19. Reason in Ethics, pp. 211-12.

6. Critical Appraisal:

A host of objections has been raised against Toulmin's analysis. But it must be acknowledged that on a great many points Toulmin has scored over his opponents. I find myself in broad agreement with the general outlines of his analysis. However, in what follows, I shall present my own reaction to his thesis and also to some of the criticisms levelled against him.

Many of Toulmin's critics have expressed their dis-satisfaction over the form of inference that Toulmin suggests as the form of moral-reasoning, viz. "evaluative inference." Toulmin writes:

Suppose that we put forward an ethical argument, consisting partly of logical (demonstrative) inferences and partly of scientific (inductive) inferences and partly of the form of inference peculiar to ethical arguments, by which we pass from factual reasons to an ethical conclusion what we might naturally call evaluative inference.²¹

Thus Toulmin appears to permit a form of inference which would be regarded by formalists as invalid because in an argument so formulated we can, Toulmin allows, arrive at a moral conclusion from factual premises. In a deductive model, however, it is believed that no information can be given in the conclusion which is not already contained in the premises. The critics of Toulmin, at this stage raise a methodological point, plainly questioning the logical adequacy of what Toulmin calls "evaluative inference". R. M. Hare, in his review of The Place of Reason in Ethics, writes thus, about evaluative inference: "If this is to be a valid inference, there must be a rule of inference (say R) to the effect that the inferences of this form are

21. Ibid. p. 38.

valid."²² He accuses Toulmin, in this connection, of trying to do what logic cannot do, i.e., inferring a moral judgment from non-moral premises. In the Language of Morals he further develops this objection. He argues that "to hold that an imperative conclusion can be derived from purely indicative premises leads to representing matters of substance as if they were verbal matters."²³ It is so because, he thinks, the imperative force of the premises is introduced into the inferential procedure. "What under the old dispensation appears as an imperative major premise reappears under the new as a rule of inference."²⁴ He argues that Toulmin's account of moral reasoning leaves out of it the decision factor which is essential to morals. A similar objection is raised by Nakhnikian²⁵ who, like Hare, argues that a prescriptive statement has imperative force, whereas a descriptive statement does not. And, because of the absence of the imperative force, the element of commitment to certain kinds of actions, which is very necessary to morality is left unaccounted for. He writes:

By construing ethical premises as either descriptive statements or as rules of inference, Toulmin denudes them of the element of commitment to action. Logically, the claim that descriptive premises with the help of 'evaluative' rules of inference lead to ethical conclusions, leaves unexplained the element of commitment to an imperative of conduct involved in accepting an ethical conclusion.²⁶

22. Ibid, Philosophical Quarterly, Vol I (July 1951) p. 374

23. Ibid, pp. 46-47.

24. Ibid, p. 48.

25. Cf. G. Nakhnikian, "An Examination of Toulmin's Analytic Ethics", Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 9 (1959), p. 79.

26. Ibid, p. 79

Let us pause for a moment and examine the legitimacy of this type of criticism.

It seems that both Hare and Nakhnikian fail to recognize a distinction which Toulmin is striving to make between 'deductive' inference and inferences of other sorts. The very fact that Toulmin qualifies the form of inference used in moral argumentation as 'evaluative' should have been taken, I should think, as an indication that he is differentiating 'evaluative' from 'deductive' or 'inductive' inference. To accuse Toulmin of violating the rules of formal logic is to be unfair to him, since he does not intend to propose a deductive model for moral reasoning. When Hare asks what is the rule of inference which makes this inference valid, he seems to be demanding a formal rule of inference. This demand is illegitimate since the 'evaluative inference' is designed to do something for which formal rules of logic would be inappropriate. The 'evaluative inference' does not come within the domain of formal rules of inference. The reason why Hare thinks that Toulmin proposes to do something what logic cannot do is that when he (Hare) talks of 'validity' the criterion of validity that he has in mind is the one appropriate to a deductive model. But, if 'deductive' and 'evaluative' arguments are different as Toulmin regards them to be, then it would be incorrect to apply the criterion of validity appropriate for one kind of argument to the other, to which it does not really apply. If critics of Toulmin are arguing that an evaluative conclusion cannot be 'entailed' by purely descriptive premises, since evaluation and description are

different, then they are fighting for a point to which Toulmin would have no objection. He would simply nod and say, 'Yes, it cannot be! That is why I am saying moral reasoning is not deductive.' Toulmin is not identifying evaluation with description.

The role of a moral rule is undoubtedly different from the role played by formal rules of logic. Toulmin would not deny it. The evaluative inference rests on the condition that what is desirable provides a reason for acting. This condition is, as Gauthier²⁷ rightly points out, neither an 'analytic truth, nor a definition'. It, however, enables us to take a substantial step to pass from the premises to a conclusion which is not entailed by them. This condition, also meets the requirement of the element of decision or commitment in morals. The sort of commitment involved in an evaluative conclusion of a moral argument is different from the commitment involved in a valid conclusion of a deductive argument.

The latter is a sort of linguistic commitment, whereas the former is extra-linguistic. In Toulmin's scheme, there is no single criterion of validity available for arguments belonging to different fields. The test of validity differs not only in case of moral-reasoning, but every mode of reasoning employs its own criterion. Toulmin rejects any suggestion to the effect that a single 'validity criterion' can be applied in every mode of reasoning. He rightly accuses formalists like Hare for their failure to "recognize that the field dependence of our logical categories is an essential feature which arises from the irreducible

27. Cf. David P. Gauthier, Practical Reasoning, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 96.

differences between the sorts of problems with which arguments are designed to deal."²⁸ It is because of this failure on their part that they have tried to apply what Toulmin calls 'the analytic criterion' of validity to all modes of reasoning.

In The Place of Reason in Ethics, Toulmin demonstrates certain examples of different modes of reasoning,²⁹ employing different criteria of validity. In The Uses of Argument, however, he pins down the distinction between different modes of reasoning to 'analytic' and 'substantial'. An 'analytic' argument is defined by him as one in which "the backing for the warrant authorizing it includes, explicitly or implicitly, the information conveyed in the conclusion itself,"³⁰ and a substantial argument is one where "the backing for the warrant does not contain the information conveyed in the conclusion."³¹

Thus 'analytic' and 'substantial' arguments belong to logically two different categories. Moral-reasoning comes under the category of substantial arguments. In the analytic argument the "warrant" consists of the rules of inference employed in formal logic, whereas in the case of substantial arguments it consists of the rules deriving from the following condition: what is desirable (to anyone) provides a reason for acting (for anyone). It permits the formally inadmissible step to convey a certain sort of information in the conclusion which is

28. Toulmin; The Uses of Argument; Cambridge, University Press, 1958, p. 176.

29. Cf. Toulmin; The Place of Reason in Ethics; pp. 68-70.

30. Toulmin; The Uses of Argument; p. 125.

31. Ibid., p. 125.

not already present in the premises. Thus, it is clear that the rule referred to for evaluative inference sanctions the non-analytic character of moral reasoning. The "warrant" in moral reasoning enables us to infer a moral judgment from the premises which do not logically entail such a judgment. It is because of this distinction that Toulmin is able to do what Hare thinks logic cannot do. Hare's objection would hold good if the condition of evaluative inference were a rule to be added up to the list of formal rules of inference, and 'evaluative inference' were a sort of deductive inference. But since neither of the two is the case, the charge that Toulmin is violating the rules of deductive inference is unwarranted.

Hare may deny Toulmin's distinction between 'analytic' and 'substantial' arguments, and thereby retain only the deductive model with analytic criterion of validity. This, however, does not seem possible. Dealing with every day problems, the sort of arguments we encounter are generally not deductive. We employ arguments in which there can be no entailment between the supporting reasons and the conclusion. We make claims about the future from the information about the past and the present. It also holds for the arguments in which we pass from the immediate past and present to a conclusion about the distant past. We make claims about a person's mental state from his behaviour. In all such cases there can be, because of their nature, no entailment relationship. The criterion of validity changes from one mode of reasoning to

another. In ethical mode of reasoning an argument is valid if its conclusion is shown, in case there is no conflict of duty, to be unambiguously related to a duty; or in case of conflicting duties or practices, if it refers to a duty or practice which prevents avoidable sufferings to other members of one's community. This is what 'validity' means within the ethical mode of reasoning, and these are its criteria of validity. There is no use harping over the point that Toulmin's analysis must be wrong since it does not conform to deductive model of reasoning. Does it really have to? The criteria of validity are to be derived from within the ethical mode of reasoning; and, Toulmin has described them. He has shown, taking some paradigm cases of moral-argument, how these criteria function and how we use them.

Another pertinent objection raised by his critics is that Toulmin does not justify the criteria of validity used in ethical reasoning. In a stimulating article³² Urmson has made out a case against the kind of technique Toulmin employs in his analysis of moral reasoning. Although Urmson does not make mention of any particular name, yet his criticism is directed against any one who uses the technique which he terms as the 'standard example or paradigm case method' in philosophical analysis. Hence, his objection can be recast against Toulmin's analysis too. We shall, therefore, consider Urmson's objection with respect to Toulmin's analysis. The reason why it is thought important to consider it is that

32. Cf. Urmson, "Some Questions Concerning Validity", Essays in Conceptual Analysis, ed. by Antony Flew, Macmillan, 1956.

a number of thinkers have criticised Toulmin on the very same grounds which Urmson has raised.

By applying the paradigm-case method, in Urmson's own words, "the philosophical doubt whether something is really an *X* is exposed as being in some way improper or absurd by means of a demonstration that the thing in question is a standard case by reference to which the expression *X* has to be understood, or a doubt whether anything is *X* is exposed by showing that certain things are standard cases of what the term in question is designed to describe."³³ Toulmin, in order to elicit the criteria of good reason in ethics considers paradigm cases of ethical disputes and on reflection finds two criteria. Urmson's argument against paradigm case method is that when we have elicited the criteria of validity for distinguishing valid ethical arguments from invalid ones we can adequately ask "why do we have these criteria of validity and whether do we have any good reasons for using these?" He argues: "Granted that this is the way in which we distinguish between valid and invalid arguments in this field. What good reasons have we for evaluating arguments in this way."³⁴ This question, according to Urmson, can be asked in the spirit of a 'genuine doubt', "Should we accept these criteria, and are there any good reasons for doing so?" It can also be asked as a 'philosophical enquiry' as to why do we employ these criteria. He further points out that we can ask a 'first-order' question about a particular argument whether it is valid, and we can

33. *Ibid.* p. 120

34. *Ibid.* p. 130.

also ask a 'second-order' question: "Why do we count as valid those ethical arguments which we do count as valid?" The paradigm case method applied to ethical reasoning can tell us, Urmson holds, what ethical arguments are valid or invalid, but it cannot give reasons as to why those arguments which we regard valid are valid? It can tell us what the criteria are, it cannot tell us why those criteria are valid? His contention is that "to discuss the question of validity by means of standard example is misconceived" because "the evaluative character of 'valid' is here overlooked,"³⁵ not giving importance to "genuine philosophical questions."

Taking the lead from Urmson, Nakhnikian accuses Toulmin of not having provided any reason for the criteria he elicits for good reasons. He writes: "The listing of the criteria, however, does not (logically) silence us. We may grant that C are the criteria for calling A good in our own community or that K are the criteria for calling A in some other community. But should I accept C or K?"³⁶ There are some other thinkers³⁷ also who, accepting much of Toulmin's analysis, consider it as incomplete. They make a further demand for the justification of the ultimate principles of morality. Thus, H. J. Paton writes, "Utilitarian

35. Ibid, p. 132.

36. George Nakhnikian, "An Examination of Toulmin's Analytical Ethics," *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 9 (1959) p. 75.

37. H. J. Paton, "Review of An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics", *Philosophy*, Vol. XXVII (Jan. 1952), pp. 81-84; William Sackstead Review of An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics", *Ethica*, Vol. LXII (April 1952) pp. 217-19.

principles have one great advantage. They at least formulate moral laws accepted by any sane philosophy. But are these laws properly regarded as first principles or can we find a further reason for them?"³⁸ Their discontent is caused by the same reason that Toulmin does not offer any justification of the 'criteria of good reasons', and shelves the question as a "limiting question". The pitch of Paton's discontent suggests that he wants Toulmin, as Kai Nelson points out,³⁹ to provide some metaphysical foundation to moral reasoning.

However, we shall not be concerned with the question whether morality needs some metaphysical groundings or not. A discussion of this question would be out of place here. Our main purpose would be to examine the adequacy of the charge that Toulmin fails to provide any reasons for the criteria of validity which according to Toulmin we actually use in moral argumentation, that Toulmin's analysis gives only a description of what criteria we use, but no reasons for the criteria it describes.

The problem, thus, immediately raises two questions: (a) Whether or not Toulmin provides any justification for the 'good reason criteria' in ethics?, and if he does, what is it?, and (b) Do we need any further justification than what Toulmin has offered, if any?

As regards the first question, our answer is in the positive. The charge that Toulmin does not give any justification for the 'good reason

38. Ibid, p. 83.

39. Cf. Kai Nelson, " 'The Good Reason Approach ' and Ontological Justification of Morality"; *Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 9 (1959) p.116.

criteria' is misconceived. It is based on a mis-understanding of Toulmin's discussion of 'limiting questions'. Toulmin's labelling of the question "Why should I do what is right" as a "limiting question" to which no 'literal answer' can be given, has been mistakenly understood as his refusal to give any reason for the 'good-reason criteria'. However, the question "Why should I do what is right?" is different from the question "Are the criteria of good reasons valid criteria?" The former is a limiting question, whereas the latter is not. The former cannot be answered properly; but an answer to the second question can be drawn from his account of moral-reasoning.

For Toulmin the scope of every mode of reasoning is limited as well as defined by the framework of the activities in which it plays a part. The scope of ethical reasoning, similarly, is defined and limited. The criteria of distinguishing good from bad reasoning, valid from invalid reasoning, are determined, within the mode of reasoning concerned, by the purpose and function it performs. Ethics is concerned with feeling and behaviour so as to achieve "the harmonious satisfaction of desires and interest." It is a "part of the process whereby as members of a community we moderate our impulses and adjust our demands so as to reconcile them as far as possible with those of our fellows".⁴⁰ The criteria of validity in ethical reasoning are determined by the (defined) function of ethics. Toulmin, thus, has a justifying reason for the 'good reason criteria' used in ethical reasoning. The criteria employed in ethical reasoning as elucidated by

40. Toulmin, An Examination of the Place of Reason in Ethics, p. 132.

Toulmin, are valid because they satisfy the requirement laid down by the function of ethics. They would not be adequate criteria if they did not meet this requirement. The function of ethics, hence, itself justifies the criteria prescribed therein. No other justification can be given except in terms of the function and purpose of ethics.

If someone asks 'Why is ethics expected to perform the above function?', Toulmin has an answer to it, namely, 'Because we as members of a community are required to respect the interests of our fellow members'. "The notions of 'duty', of 'obligation', of 'morality', are derived from situations in which the conduct of one member of a community prejudices the interests of another, and are to be understood as part of the procedure for minimizing the effects of such conflicts."⁴¹

Thus, our answer to the second question is in the negative. Since the criteria of good reasons are determined by the function of ethics, the function itself justifies those criteria. No more justification is needed. And, if an Urnson type doubt is extended to this justification, we shall begin asking what Toulmin calls a "limiting question".

In the above, we have been arguing against certain methodological objections raised against Toulmin's 'evaluative inference'. Our attempt has been to show that what Toulmin is suggesting, in the form of evaluative inference, is quite legitimate; and, hence, none of the objections discussed above held good; and also that he offers a justification for the validity criterion used in moral reasoning. However the above discussion is not intended to be

41. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

a clean certificate to Toulmin's analysis. We do not dispute his claim that the character of moral reasoning is non-deductive as well as non-inductive. In moral-reasoning we pass from factual reasons to an ethical conclusion. And, therefore, we also agree with Toulmin that the criteria of validity used in ethical argumentation are different from the ones employed in deductive reasoning. Toulmin, however, fails to carry out the suggested model faithfully. In the process of his analysis he offers an account which seems incompatible with his proposed model of moral-reasoning.

Let us restate his criteria. According to his analysis, it would be recalled, an appeal to a single current moral principle in one's community constitutes the test of the rightness of an individual act, and those reasons which relate an action to an accepted social practice or moral principle are good reasons. Where there is a conflict of duties, we choose the alternative which best avoids preventable sufferings to the members of the community, and, therefore, the criterion here is that of avoiding preventable sufferings. Similarly when one is confronted with choosing one of the alternative moral codes, the criterion, here is again - avoiding preventable sufferings. It would mean that to say that a certain reason *R* is a good reason for an ethical judgment *E*, is to say that *R* relates *E* to a criterion *C* (where *C* can be either a social practice current in one's community, or it can be the principle of avoiding preventable sufferings to other members of one's community).

We should think that C itself does not constitute a reason for E, rather it only tells why a certain reason is a good reason for E. As far as C is not entered in an ethical argument as a premise, the argument would remain non-deductive, ~~and the relationship between premises and the conclusion becomes that of entailment.~~ Now, the difficulty with Toulmin is that on the one hand he is denying the entailment relationship and hence rejecting the deductive model, and on the other, he seems to enter C as a premise of the argument. And this lands him into difficulties. Let us consider the example⁴² he gives in order to explain the logical structure of reasoning concerning the rightness of individual actions. His example roughly runs as follows: 'I ought to take this book and give it back to Jones.' 'Because, I promised to let him have it before midday. S_1 ' 'I ought to because I promised to let him have it back. S_2 ' 'Because I ought to do whatever I promise him to do. S_3 ' 'Because I ought to do whatever I promise anyone to do. S_4 ' 'Because anyone ought to do whatever he promises anyone else that he will do. S_5 ' In the above example S_1 to S_5 constitute good reasons in support of the judgment-- 'I ought to take this book and give it back to Jones.' S_5 , which states a moral principle, is given as a final justificatory reason for the judgment. A close look at the example would reveal that the argument is designed in a typically deductive fashion, and the most it can tell about ethical reasoning is that they are deductive enthymemes. It can be alternatively reformulated explicitly after the deductive model without changing its

42. Cf. Toulmin, The Place of Reason in Ethics, p. 146.

character:

Anyone ought to do whatever he promises anyone else that he will do.

I promised Jones to return this book before midday.

Therefore, I ought to return this book to Jones before midday.

The argument so formulated is clearly a deductive one where the judgment is implied by the premises. It would be contradictory to assert the premises and deny E. Hence the criterion of validity is in no sense different from the 'analytic criterion of validity'.

Toulmin, perhaps would not accept such a reformulation but insist that S_5 in the above example has not been used as one of the premises which imply the original judgment, rather it is employed as an inferential licence. S_1 is a good reason for E; and S_2 , S_3 and S_4 are given to connect S_1 to S_5 . My returning the book is supported by the reason that I have promised to do so. That I have promised to return the book to Jones is a good reason for my returning the book because it unambiguously relates my act of returning the book to a duty which is currently accepted in my community. It is, however, not clear as to what the expression 'relates to' exactly means. How does one relate E to an accepted practice of one's community? Probably what Toulmin means here is that if an action in question has been shown to be an instance of a certain moral principle then the action is right. "If it is an action which is an unambiguous instance of a maxim generally accepted in the community concerned, it will be right just because it is an instance of such a maxim."⁴³ But saying this would amount to accepting the deductive model for moral arguments.

43. *Ibid.* p. 154.

In the reformulated version of the above argument, the ethical judgment appearing as the conclusion is an instance of the major premise which states a general principle. To say that E is an instance of C (a duty, a certain practice) is to say that C entails E.

In Toulmin's scheme if a certain reason P satisfies the criterion of good reasons, say X (where X is either a practice currently accepted in one's community, or X is the principle of preventing avoidable sufferings), and if P is true, from this we can infer that P is a reason in ethics. This inference again is deductive for if one accepts that P satisfies X and P is true, then one is bound to accept that P is a reason in ethics. Now, to say that 'P is a good reason in ethics' is to say, according to Toulmin, that P can be counted as a reason for a certain ethical judgment J. Furthermore, to say that P is a good reason for J is to say that P justifies J. Thus, from 'P is a good reason in ethics', and 'P is a good reason for J', we can infer 'J'. The inference, here, is again deductive. Ethical arguments are, Toulmin would agree, instances of this scheme, but if it be so, then the arguments themselves would be deductive, which Toulmin would not accept. However, this difficulty is not insuperable, if he permits certain modifications in his analysis.

Toulmin ends up in this difficulty because, on the one hand he interprets ethical arguments as non-deductive, and on the other, he wants to import the rigour of 'deductive' inference into 'evaluative' inference. But he cannot do both. If moral reasoning is non-deductive, then ethical arguments cannot be as rigorous as deductive arguments are. That is to say that the bond that

is believed to exist between premises and conclusion of a deductive argument, cannot have the same strength in an ethical argument. A certain amount of looseness will always enter into the relationship between the good reason and an ethical judgment of an ethical argument, if the inference is non-deductive. However, his analysis does not permit this, unless he is prepared to accept that the relationship in 'P relates J to X, therefore J' is loose. And it seems Toulmin is wrong in not allowing it. However, if he accepts it, the essential character of his analysis would remain the same, and the looseness in the relationship can be accounted for in terms of the condition (what is desirable provides a reason for acting) of evaluative inference.

CHAPTER FOURTH

The Prescriptive Approach to Moral Reasoning:

R. M. Hare

In Chapter Third we considered a non-deductive model of moral reasoning. Hare, unlike Toulmin, however, regards moral reasoning as strictly deductive. His is a modified version of Aristotle's practical syllogism. In moral reasoning, Hare claims, the inference is never loose, rather the relationship between premises and the ethical conclusion is that of 'entailment'. He puts up a strong defence of the Humean doctrine that no moral judgment can be deduced from non-moral premises. He reminds us of the logical restriction that nothing can be said in the "conclusion which is not said implicitly or explicitly in the premises, except what can be added solely on the strength of definitions of terms."¹ To this effect, Hare's Language of Morals and Freedom and Reason work out an analytic model of moral arguments. His analysis comes in sharp contrast with Stevensonian as well as Toulminian analyses that have been discussed so far.

We have discussed in the previous chapter Hare's reasons for rejecting Toulmin's analysis of ethical reasoning. He rejects Stevenson's approach on the ground that though moral language is non-cognitive, it is not purely emotive. The persuasive approach, Hare argues, wrongly suggests that the

1. R. M. Hare, The Language of Morals, Oxford, at the Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 33.

function of moral language is to persuade, or "getting someone to do something." "Telling someone to do something" is logically distinct from "getting someone to do something." This distinction is like "telling someone that something is the case", and, "getting someone to believe that something is the case." When a person persuades somebody to do something, he is not answering the question "what shall I do?", rather, "it is an attempt to make him answer it in a particular way."² Hare, however, agrees with Stevenson that a moral judgment has imperative force, but he disagrees with him on the point that no logical argument can be adduced in favour of an imperative. He holds that the "Logical behaviour" of imperative sentences "is in many respects as exemplary as that of indicative sentences, and in particular that it is possible to infer an imperative conclusion from imperative premises."³ Thus, Hare rejects the "criterion which . . . says . . . that indicative sentences are the only sentences with which logic is called upon to deal."⁴ Moral judgments, for Stevenson, are imperatival because they express speaker's desire to change the attitude of the hearer, whereas, for Hare, they entail imperatives because they are prescriptive.

Hare's analysis of moral argumentation primarily hinges on his analysis of moral judgments and moral concepts. The analysis of moral concepts is required in order to explicate moral reasoning, showing that moral arguments proceed as they do because of the logical character of ethical predicates. As Hare himself remarks: "Once the logical character of the moral concepts is

2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

3. R. M. Hare, "Imperative Sentences", *Mind*, Vol. LVIII (1949) p. 22.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

understood, there can be useful and compelling moral arguments even between people who have, before it begins, no substantive moral principles in common."⁵ He works out his analysis resting on his belief that moral judgments are both prescriptive and universalizable, and that there can be logical relationships between prescriptive utterances. The prescriptivity and the universalizability of moral judgments also function, in Hare's scheme, as the two basic rules of moral-reasoning.⁶ While making a decision of 'what we ought to do?' we look for "an action to which we can commit ourselves (prescriptively) . . . accept as exemplifying a principle of action for others in like circumstances (universalizability)"⁷. Any serious moral problem would involve, according to Hare, an 'antinomy' of two important features: Firstly, "that a man who is faced with such a problem knows that it is his problem and that nobody can answer it for him."⁸ Secondly, "the answering of moral questions is or ought to be a rational activity".⁹ The paradox involved here is that a person who confronts a moral problem is, on the one hand, free to form his own moral opinions, and on the other, his moral opinions cannot be arbitrary because of the condition that the resolution of a moral problem must be rational. Hare, however, has his own way for resolving this antinomy. It is because we as moral agents are free to form our moral opinions that we need a prescriptive language. The prescriptivity, hence, is connected with our freedom

5. R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 187.

6. Cf. R.M. Hare, Freedom and Reason, p. 89.

7. Ibid. pp. 89-90.

8. Ibid. p. 1.

9. Ibid. p. 2.

to form moral opinions. Universalizability of moral judgments, on the other hand, provides a rational backing to our moral thoughts because, to universalize a moral judgment, for Hare, is to give reasons. "If, when we consider some proposed action, we find that when universalized, it yields prescription which we cannot accept, we reject this action as a solution to our moral problem — if we cannot universalize the prescription, it cannot become an 'ought' ".¹⁰

In short, Hare's thesis is that moral reasoning does not require a new kind of logic as Toulmin thinks; instead ethical inference is as logical, and hence as deductive, as any other inference. A general moral principle together with a description of the state of affairs yields a moral judgment. He accepts the Aristotelian practical syllogism as an adequate model of moral arguments of which the major premise, "is a principle of conduct; the minor premise is a statement, . . . of what we should in fact be doing"¹¹ in an ethical context. Aristotle had thought that the outcome of practical syllogism is an action. From the universal major premises, "All that is sweet should be tasted", and the minor particular premise "This is sweet", "it necessarily follows that he who is able and is not hindered should not only draw, but put in practice, the conclusion "This is to be tasted".¹² Hare retains this syllogistic form of practical reasoning, but the universal major premise is replaced by an imperative or a moral principle. The

10. *Ibid.* p. 90.

11. *The Language of Morals*, p. 56.

12. *The Nicomachean Ethics of Aristotle*, trans. by D.P. Chase, New York, E.P. Dutton and Co. Inc. 1949, p. 159.

moral principle in conjunction with the appropriate particular premise yields a moral judgment; and if assent is given to the resultant moral judgment it commits the speaker to act in a certain way.

However, to appreciate Hare's account of moral reasoning, it is imperative to dwell upon his arguments for holding (i) that a moral judgment is prescriptive in nature, (ii) that it is universalizable, and (iii) that there are logical relations between prescriptive judgments including imperatives. It is important to discuss these three theses - for the structure of moral arguments, as Hare conceives it, is woven around these central notions.

1. The Prescriptive Function of Moral Language:

The distinctive function of a moral utterance is, according to Hare, to guide choices. Moral Language is, hence, a sort of prescriptive language. It is so because ethics deals with the practical problem 'what shall I do?' A moral judgment is, in this respect, essentially connected with decision. This connection is not factual but logical. Accepting a prescription logically commits one to take a decision. The only test, Hare contends, to decide whether one is using the judgment "I ought to return the book", as a moral judgment or not is "Does he or does he not recognize that if he assents to the judgment, he must also assent to the command"¹³ 'let me return the book'. Thus moral judgments, since they are action-guiding, must involve a decision to act in a certain way. They must entail an imperative - for only

13. The Language of Morals, pp. 168-69.

a command can constitute an adequate answer to the question - 'What shall I do?'. A judgment might not involve a decision, Hare argues, only under two conditions. Firstly, it might not involve a decision in case the value judgment is used completely in descriptive terms, i.e. in, what Hare calls, 'non-evaluative, inverted comma sense'. In such a case, Hare thinks, the value standard gets completely 'ossified', and the evaluative sense of the judgment is precluded. "Thus it is possible to say: 'You ought to go and call on so and soes' meaning by it no value judgment at all, but simply the descriptive judgment that such an action is required in order to conform to a standard which people in general, or a certain kind of people not specified but well understood, accept."¹⁴ Secondly, a judgment would not be evaluative when one is stating a psychological fact. "I have a feeling I ought to do X", is different from, "I ought to do X." It is only the latter expression which is being used in an evaluative sense. Therefore, if one accepts the value judgment "I ought to do X", then his acceptance entails his decision to do X. Hare makes it a matter of definition that a judgment, when used in an evaluative sense, entails an imperative. He says: "it must be a part of the function of a moral judgment to prescribe or guide choices, that is to say, to entail an answer to some question of the form, 'what shall I do?' "¹⁵ Now, since an answer to the question, "what shall I do?", involves telling someone to do something, only a prescriptive judgment can perform this function. In other words, the question "what shall I do?" requires a prescription. And, the prescription cannot be reduced to a description as a naturalist might try to do - for a description, Hare holds, can never be a

14. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 29.

prescription. Nor can it be interpreted as an attempt to persuade someone to do something as an emotivist of the Stevensonian variety might. Although Hare accepts that a moral judgment has descriptive elements too, the descriptive meaning is only secondary because it varies from context to context, while the prescriptive meaning remains constantly the same even in varying contents. Therefore, a value predicate, for instance, 'good', cannot be defined in terms of words which themselves do not perform any prescriptive function.¹⁶ Hence moral judgments, since their function is to guide choices, must contain 'irreducible prescriptive' elements. Hare writes, "... moral philosophers cannot have both ways; either they must recognize the irreducibly prescriptive element in moral judgments, or else they must allow that moral judgments, as interpreted by them do not guide actions in the way that, as ordinarily understood, they obviously do."¹⁷

2. Universalizability:

Along with the prescriptive feature of moral judgments, there is another important feature, viz. 'universalizability'. A moral judgment which correctly applies to some particular person in some particular situation is also, according to Hare, correctly applicable to any other situation which is like the former in all relevant respects. He holds that, "the meaning of the word 'ought' and other moral words is such that a person who uses them commits himself thereby to a universal rule".¹⁸ The

16. Cf. The Language of Morals, p. 91.

17. Ibid. p. 195.

18. Freedom and Reason, p. 30.

universalizability feature, however, is not peculiar to moral judgments alone; rather, according to Hare, it is shared by any judgment which carries descriptive meaning.¹⁹ Moral judgments are, "universalizable in just the same way as descriptive judgments are universalizable, namely the way which follows from the fact that both moral expressions and descriptive expressions have descriptive meaning."²⁰ He further contends that a judgment is universalizable, "in the sense that it commits the speaker to the further proposition that anything exactly like the subjects of the first judgment, or like it in the relevant respects, possesses the property attributed to it in the first judgment."²¹ When a person says that a certain thing X is red, he is committed to the view that anything which was like X in the relevant respects would likewise be red. Thus, 'X is red', entails 'Everything like X in the relevant respects is red'. It is so, "because to say that something is red while denying that some other thing which resembles it in the relevant respects is red is to misuse the word red; and this is because 'red' is a descriptive term, and because therefore to say that something is red is to say that it is of a certain kind and so to imply that anything which is of that same kind is red."²²

Similarly, value judgments are also universalizable. When a person passes the judgment, 'that is a good motor car', he is guiding the choice of his hearer not only in relation to that particular motor car but also in relation to any other motor car which is like that one. He is implying that if any

19. Cf. Freedom and Reason, p. 30.

20. Ibid., p. 30.

21. Ibid., p. 12.

22. Ibid., p. 11.

other motor car were just like that one, it would also be a good one. He cannot say 'this is a good motor car, but the one next to it, though exactly like it in all other respects, is not good' because by doing so, he would be commending one object and in the same breath refusing to commend a similar object. But, if two things have similar descriptive features, they cannot, Hare contends, differ in their goodness. In choosing a particular motor car we apply a certain principle or standard. In other words, in saying that 'that is a good motor car,' one also expresses one's acceptance of a standard which has its application to other similar motor cars.²³ It is a logical requirement that the standard should be employed consistently. Hence, it would be a contradiction to say that, 'this is a good motor car, but the one next to it, though exactly like it in all other respects is not good.'

Hare, in his paper entitled "Universalizability,"²⁴ like Gellner,²⁵ distinguishes between what he terms as U-type and E-type valuations. A U-type valuation, according to Gellner is an application of a rule wholly devoid of any personal references, a rule containing merely predicates (descriptions) and logical terms.²⁶ An E-type valuation, on the contrary, is one containing some uneliminable personal reference. Moral judgments are U-type valuations. Hare claims of his universalizability thesis analyticity in virtue of the meaning of the word "moral". A judgment is not

23. Cf. The Language of Morals, p. 129.

24. R. M. Hare 'Universalizability', "Proceedings of Aristotelian Society", 1954-55, pp. 295-312.

25. Cf. Gellner, "Logic and Ethics", "Proceedings of Aristotelian Society", 1954-55, pp. 157-78.

26. Cf. "Logic and Ethics" p. 163.

universalizable would not be a moral judgment. Similarly in Freedom and Reason, he argues that a person who justifies an action without committing himself to the universalizability requirement does not provide a moral justification.²⁷

A clarification is needed here. One might think that 'universalizability' and 'prescriptivity', which Hare conceives as basic features of a moral judgment, are incompatible with each other. If moral judgments are universalizable in virtue of their descriptive meaning, then they cannot, at the same time be prescriptive. For, a description according to Hare, can never be a prescription. This, however, would be a misunderstanding of Hare's position. The two features would be incompatible only if, on Hare's view moral judgments were primarily descriptive. But it is not so. Moral judgments though they share the universalizability feature with descriptive judgments in virtue of their descriptive meaning, besides having descriptive meaning, they primarily possess evaluative meaning. And, therefore, both the features are mutually consistent.

3. Logic of Imperative Sentences:

Moral judgments, besides being prescriptive and universalizable, entail imperatives. He writes:

But to guide choices or actions, a moral judgment has to be such that if a person assents to it, he must assent to some imperative sentence derivable from it; in other words, if a person does not assent to some such imperative sentence, that is a knock down evidence that he does not assent to the moral judgment in an evaluative sense... This is true by

27. Cf. Freedom and Reason, p. 99.

my definition of the word evaluative.²⁸

Now, since Hare maintains that the relationship between the premises and conclusion in an ethical argument is strictly that of "entailment", and also that moral judgments "entail" imperatives, the logic of moral reasoning in Hare's scheme is, therefore, essentially the logic of imperative sentences. Hare regards that commands are amenable to logical rules as are statements of facts, "... commands, ... because like statements, are essentially intended for answering questions by rational agents, are governed by logical rules just as statements are. And this means moral judgments may also be so governed."²⁹ The important difference between an imperative and an indicative consists in the fact that "An indicative sentence is used for telling someone that something is the case; an imperative is not -- it is used for telling someone to make something the case."³⁰

The imperative and the indicative, however, according to Hare, share some common characteristics. As for example, the command, 'Bring me a glass of water' and the indicative, 'You are going to bring a glass of water' are both about your bringing a glass of water in the immediate future. In this respect they are similar. The distinctive features of a command and an indicative are brought out, in Hare's language, by translating them as, "your bringing a glass of water in immediate future, please" and "your bringing a glass of water in immediate future, yes." Here, the indicative component is signified by the word "yes"; and the imperative component by the word "please". The common component of both the sentences, in Hare's

28. The Language of Morals pp. 171-72.

29. Ibid., pp. 15-16.

30. Ibid., p. 5.

terminology, is called "phrastic" and the part which differentiates an imperative and an indicative is termed as "neustic". The "phrastic of the indicative" and the "phrastic of the imperative" are the same because they signify the "thing" which both the indicative and imperative are about. The difference in the neustic of the indicative and the neustic of the imperative consists in the nature of the way assent is made to an indicative and to an imperative. Thus, Hare writes, "If we assent to a statement, we are said to be sincere in our assent if and only if we believe that it is true (believe what the speaker has said)"³¹ "whereas if "we assent to a second person command addressed to ourselves, we are said to be sincere in our assent if and only if we do or resolve to do what the speaker has told us to do."³² Likewise, in the case of a third person command to assent means to "join in affirming"; and in the case of a first person command "affirmation and assent are identical." To put it briefly, when we give our assent to an indicative sentence, we express our belief in the sentence in question; whereas : in the case of commands it is a matter of doing or resolving to do something given appropriate and proper conditions.

The distinction between "phrastic" and "neustic" is quite important in Hare's scheme. Since the difference is thought to consist only in the manner of assenting, it does not concern the essential content of the two. Both "bring a glass of water" and "you are bringing a glass of water" are about your bringing a glass of water in the immediate future. Hence, an imperative has as much reference to actual or possible state of affairs as an indicative has. A command also has a logical structure and admits of

31. *Ibid.*, p. 19.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-20.

the possibility of self-contradiction. Thus, from the premises "Take all the boxes to the station" and "This is one of the boxes", the conclusion follows: "Take this to the station". The conclusion is entailed by the conjunction of the imperative major premise with the indicative minor premise. The inference is mainly from the "phrastic" to "phrastic". Hare formulates the logical rule as follows:

"No imperative conclusion can be validly drawn from a set of premises which does not contain at least one imperative."³³

Therefore, since a moral judgment is not a statement of fact and its function is such that it involves an imperative, by the very logic of imperatives Hare makes it impossible to derive a moral judgment from non-moral premises.

4. Nature of Moral Reasoning:

The above is a brief description of Hare's views on the nature and function of moral language. We can now state his thesis about the nature of moral-arguments. Since moral judgments are action-guiding, they are closely connected with decision-making. The process of making a decision involves, according to Hare, two factors corresponding to the two premises in Aristotle's practical syllogism. "The major premise is a principle of conduct, the minor premise is a statement, more or less full, of what we should in fact be doing if we did one or the other of the alternatives open to us. Thus if I decide, not to say something, because it is false, I am acting on a principle, 'Never (or never under certain conditions) say what

33. Ibid., p. 28.

is false', and I must know that this, which I am wondering whether to say, is false."³⁴

Thus, it would follow from this that a decision about 'what shall I do?' must rest on a principle. It is, however, not necessary that such a decision be related to a principle which has previously been adopted. A principle might be formulated in the very act of making a decision. A decision not resting on some principle remains arbitrary and no reason can be given in support of that. Whenever one is faced with a situation where one is to choose between alternative courses of action, it is between alternative sets of effects that one decides. Thus, the effects become the sole determinants of what one should be doing. And, "to choose effects because they are such and such is to begin to act on a principle that such and such effects are to be chosen."³⁵ The reason why choosing to do something is so closely related with principle is that, "when we learn to do something what we learn is always a principle".³⁶

Principles and actions interact. It is because of this interaction that at times our principles get modified or replaced by new ones. We come across enormously new situations where previously adopted principles become unworkable unless they are modified. As for example, while learning to drive one is taught to signal before one stops. But at a time of emergency one gives up this principle and does not signal

34. *Ibid.* p. 56.

35. *Ibid.* p. 59.

36. *Ibid.* p. 60.

before stopping but keeps both his hands on the steering wheel. Here one is making a decision of a new principle which has not been previously taught. Thus, almost all decisions, Hare holds, are decisions of principles.

Now, since a value judgment expresses a decision, the principle underlying a decision also underlies the corresponding prescription or value judgment. And, since a principle is a universal 'ought' judgment, Hare holds that it would be logically illegitimate to make a singular ought judgment "while denying that there was any principle on which it depended."³⁷ The demand for an imperative as a premise in a moral argument is thus met by the principle underlying the judgment. The principle appears as the major premise in the argument.

Thus, if a person says "X ought to be done," this judgment being a moral one must be universalizable. That is to say, the person who makes this judgment must be prepared to accept (applying the universalizability principle) that all other actions, which are exactly like X, or resemble it in respect of the properties because of which it is said that "X ought to be done", ought also to be done. Thus, if 'Y is like X or resembles X in relevant respects, then, because of the 'universalizability' and 'prescriptivity' features of moral judgments, it follows that 'Y also ought to be done'. It is, however, possible that among the actions which are identical with X or like X in relevant respects, there are also actions which the speaker would not like to perform. He is,

37. *Ibid.*, p. 157.

then confronted with the problem of taking a decision whether to accept the original moral judgment, "X ought to be done" or to reject it. If he accepts it then there is no room for him to refuse to perform any other action which is like X. That is, if he accepts "X ought to be done," the original judgment along with the factual or descriptive statement about the likeness of X and Y entails the moral judgment "Y ought to be done." To reject the judgment occurring as the conclusion would amount to rejecting the original judgment, or else it would result in selfcontradiction. The argument in the above example would break down if we take out the element of 'universalisability' from 'ought' because it entails that in passing a judgment on a particular person we implicitly pass a judgment on every one else who would pass a similar one on ourselves if we were to do it.

Hare claims that his views on the logic of moral discourse do not commit him to any particular moral point of view. The universalisability rule is not a moral rule, rather it is a logical rule. In moral reasoning, inferences are strictly deductive, but not "linear" i. e. a premise-to-conclusion type as adopted by naturalists. Rather, it is a sort of exploration where we look for moral judgments which are both acceptable to ourselves for our own conduct, as well as "universalizable to cover the conduct of other actual or hypothetical people."³⁸

Thus, in considering, whether it would be right to put my debtor, who fails to pay, in jail or not, I would consider whether I am prepared

38. Freedom and Reason, p. 193.

to accept the universal judgment "Let anyone who is in my circumstances put his debtor in jail". If I accept this universal judgment then I would logically be committed to accepting a first person judgment to the effect that, if I were somebody's insolvent debtor, I ought to ^{be} put in jail, though it is not necessary that I should in fact be somebody else's debtor. What is required for the force of the argument is that I should imaginatively consider the hypothetical case about myself. However, Hare argues, because of this logical implication about myself and my strong inclination against going to jail, I would not be able to assent to the first person judgment and thereby refuse to accept the universal judgment. And if I do accept the first person prescription I would be a "fanatic". He writes:

What prevents us from accepting certain moral judgments which are perfectly formulable in the language is not logic alone, but the fact that they have certain logical consequences which we cannot accept, namely certain singular prescriptions to other people in hypothetical situations. And the 'cannot', here is not a logical 'cannot'. It would not be self-contradictory to accept these prescriptions but all the same we cannot accept them except on one condition which is most unlikely to be fulfilled - namely that we should become what I have called 'fanatics.' 39

Hare establishes a certain analogy between scientific and moral reasoning. Moral reasoning is a kind of exploration. In science, Hare holds, a considerable part of the exploration consists in deriving certain implications of the proposed hypothesis for particular cases. When a certain implication of the proposed hypothesis is found to be conflicting with the observed phenomena, the hypothesis is rejected or modified. In

39. *Ibid.* p. 193.

case of moral reasoning we universalize the judgment and see whether the singular judgment "entailed" by the universal judgment is acceptable or not. We reject the singular prescription entailed by the original judgment if it conflicts with the individual's inclination or group interest.

The argument about the debtor was concerned with the interests of only two persons. Hare generalizes the prescriptive argument to cover the cases in which interests of more than two persons are involved. The sort of considerations entertained in such cases have some affinities with traditional utilitarianism⁴⁰ aiming at maximising satisfaction and reconciliation of conflicting interests. However, the essential character of the argument remains the same since it is only an extended application of the universalisability requirement.

If my action is going to affect the interests of a number of people... what I shall have to do... is to put myself imaginatively in the place of other parties... and ask the same sort of questions as we make the creditor ask when he imagined himself in the situation of the debtor. And the considerations which weigh in this enquiry can only be, how much (as I imagine myself in the place of each in turn) do I want to have this or avoid that? But when I have been the round of all the affected parties, and come back, in my own person, to make an impartial moral judgment giving equal weight to the interests of all parties, what can I possibly do except advocate that course which will, taken all in all, least frustrate the desires which I have imagined myself having.⁴¹

Here holds that the method of moral reasoning discussed above will settle almost any moral problem ensuing from ethical disagreement. His claim is that any moral argument which is not fallacious and does not contain any suppressed premises would be in the form

40. Cf. Freedom and Reason, p. 113.

41. Ibid. p. 123.

suggested by him. He, however, accepts that at times ethical disputes arise not because of conflicting interests but because of conflicting ideals. In such cases his method might seem to fail in resolving the conflict. But he argues that it is neither possible to settle disputes between upholder of different ideals nor one expects them ever to be settled.⁴²

5. Critical Appraisal:

The force behind Hare's analytic model is his strict adherence to Hume's law that no moral judgment can be derived from purely factual premises. On Hare's interpretation, to do so would be to commit the naturalistic fallacy. We shall not, however, involve ourselves in the controversy whether a moral judgment can or cannot be derived from purely factual premises. For, we have already commented in chapters First and Third, that it is a matter of how we define a deductive argument. If we define it in the manner which by definition makes it impossible to say anything in the conclusion which is not already contained in the premises then obviously a moral judgment cannot be derived from factual premises. But if it is accepted that it is not essential to apply to ethical arguments the notion of validity as applied to non-ethical deductive arguments, and therefore, ethical arguments can be valid in quite a different sense; then we see no reason why an ethical argument must be required to fit in to the strictly deductive structure.

42. Cf. Freedom and Reason; pp. 151; 155-56.

Hare's case against naturalism would hold only if a naturalist were to accept his deflation of validity and hold that in an ethical argument factual premises, 'entail' a moral conclusion. Although an ethicist like Baier would accept all this, he would still meet Hare's objection by interpreting moral judgments as 'fact-stating', 'claim-making' assertions. It will not, however, be contradictory to say that an 'entailment' relationship does not hold between the premises and conclusion of ethical arguments, and that they can be valid but not in the same sense in which non-ethical analytic arguments are. Toulmin, we have seen in the previous chapter, offers such a model of moral argumentation, and Hare has not been able to falsify Toulmin's analysis. His distinction between "analytic" and "substantial" arguments hangs like a sword of Democles over Hare's analysis.

In a challenging article⁴³ Amartya Kumar Sen convincingly argues that Hare's claim that moral judgments are universalisable is inconsistent with his adherence to Hume's law that no moral judgment can be derived from statements of fact alone. Sen's claim is that Hare's universalisability thesis commits him to accepting that there is at least one instance in which a value-judgment is "entailed" by factual premises. In what follows, we shall summarize Sen's argument and discuss its implications for Hare's analysis.

43. Cf. A.K. Sen "Hume's Law Hare's Rule"; Philosophy (Vol. XL4) Jan. 1966; pp. 75-79.

one next to it" because 'good' being a "supervenient epithet",⁴⁵ two objects cannot be said to differ only in their goodness if they are descriptively alike. Thus, what the argument in this context amounts to is "It is not the case that this motor is exactly like the one next to it, but this is not as good a motor car as that one". But this is logically equivalent to asserting "If this motor car is exactly like the one next to it, then this is as good a motor car as that one." In this hypothetical formula, the antecedent is descriptive whereas the consequent is a judgment of value. Thus, Sen writes: "we arrive, therefore, at a position, that according to Hare if we do say C (This motor car is exactly like the one next to it), not only can we not say 'not V' (This motor car is not as good as the one next to it), but we are committed to saying V (This motor car is as good as the one next to it). But this means that there is a value-judgment that can be derived from an exclusively factual premise."⁴⁶

This conclusion would seriously damage Hare's entire analysis of moral reasoning because of his strict adherence to both Hume's law and the universalizability thesis. Hare is left with only two alternatives, either to give up his acceptance of Hume's law, or withdraw his universalizability thesis.

Now, suppose, Hare withdraws his acceptance of Hume's law. It would immediately follow that he would have, then, no objection to inferring a value judgment from non-value premises. This, in other words,

45. Ibid, p. 131.

46. "Hume's Law and Hare's Rule" p. 76.

would mean that a prescriptive judgment can be derived from descriptive premises. The inference would be valid, on his own admission, solely due to the meanings of the words in it. This implication has extremely upsetting consequences for the major part of his thesis. For, it would immediately commit him, much against his wishes, to ethical cognitivism. In the Language of Morals as well as Freedom and Reason Hare devotes a lot of time to making the distinction between description and prescription and claims that 'good' and other value predicates cannot be defined in purely descriptive terms because of the irreducibly prescriptive elements in these words which constitute their primary meaning. But with Hume's law the hard distinction between description and prescription also goes. This would further affect his distinction between meaning and criteria, since he identifies the descriptive elements of value-words with the criteria of their application, and the prescriptive element with their meaning. Thus, by withdrawing his defence to Hume's law Hare will have to disown his claim that a description cannot entail a prescription, for this itself is a variant of Hume's law. Here, we are not denying Hare's distinction between prescription and description, what we want to show is that if Hare gives up his commitment to Hume's law, then these distinctions ipso facto get modified. And, therefore, if he attempts to accommodate naturalism in his analysis, he will not succeed unless he is prepared to change the essential character of his thesis.

If, on the other hand, Hare retains Hume's law, he can do it only if he gives up his universalizability thesis. But if he does so, it would be still more disastrous - for in that case he would be making moral justification impossible. Hare conceives of the universalizability principle not as a moral rule, but as a logical rule. A moral judgment entails a corresponding universal judgment which in its turn entails singular prescriptions. This is so because of the very logic of value judgments. If a value judgment is not universalizable, it ceases to be a value judgment, and consequently it cannot be justified either. In his paper on "Universalisability" (P.A.S. 1954-55), Hare constructs the following conversation between an existentialist and a Kantian which brings to light the above point.

E: "You ought not to do that."

K: "So you think that one ought not to do that kind of thing?"

E: "I think nothing of the kind, I say only that you ought not to do that."

K: "Don't you even imply that a person like me in circumstances of this kind ought not to do : that kind of thing when the other people involved are the sort of people that they are?"

E: "No, I say only that you ought not to do that."

K: "Are you making a moral judgment?"

E: "Yes"

K: "In that case I fail to understand your use of the word moral."

What the above conversation reveals is that universalisability of moral judgments follows from the very meaning of the word 'moral'. The crux of his analysis of moral reasoning is that if anyone said "I, you, or, he ought to do so and so", he is thereby committing himself to the rule "One ought to do so and so." And, this is because of the meaning of "ought".

The above consideration shows that Hare can in no way afford to give up his universalisability principle. But, then, he cannot continue with it either if he retains Hume's law. And, if he gives up Hume's law, his entire thesis changes radically from what it is to be. This puts him between the devil and the deep sea. However, Hare might try to come out of it by accepting the position of what Sen calls the "Existential naturalist". That is, he might say that there are only some inferences (at least the one Sen refers to) in which a value judgment is derived from factual premises, thereby accepting exception to the Humean doctrine. But, it would be too much of a compromise to be adjusted in his system. For, in that case he would have to give an explanation for such an exception; and there is no such explanation we can think of which can be given from within his system.

Let us, however, presently accept Hare's analysis, and see whether his model of moral-reasoning actually provides an efficient method of resolving moral disputes. For, the strongest (and irrefutable) argument against any theory of moral reasoning would be that

it does not succeed in doing just what it is expected to do. It is more so in case of Hare because of his claim that his method is capable of resolving all genuine moral disputes. We shall, in what follows, first consider Hare's creditor-debtor example of moral argument where the interests of only two parties are involved. Secondly, we shall consider his judge criminal example where the interests of more than two parties are involved.

Let us recall the creditor-debtor example. The argument concerns a creditor A, who has to decide whether he should put his insolvent debtor B into prison in order to make him pay. Hare argues that if A decides in favour of putting B into prison that is, if he decides to pass the value judgment 'I ought to put B into prison because he will not pay me what he owes', then he will have to consider whether he is prepared to issue the corresponding universal judgment "Anyone who is in my position ought to put his debtor into prison if he does not pay" because of the logical requirement, that value judgments 'entail' corresponding universal judgments. But if A assents to the universal judgment, then he will be committed to accepting the singular prescription "I ought to be put into prison if I were somebody's insolvent debtor", since this singular prescription is 'entailed' by the said universal judgment. If A does not assent to this singular prescription about himself then he will have to withdraw the original judgment "I ought to put B into prison because he will not pay me what he owes,". Not doing so will be contradictory. However, the important point that Hare makes is that A cannot

accept the singular prescription "I ought to be put into prison if I were somebody's insolvent debtor." The 'cannot' here does not refer to any logical impossibility; instead, it refers to A's strong inclination against going to prison. And, if A does accept the singular prescription about himself, then, Hare thinks, A would be a 'fanatic'. The crux of the argument is that if a certain singular value judgment, like the one referred to above, conflicts with the agent's 'inclination' then the value judgment in question must be withdrawn. This is the point we wish to contend.

Firstly, it is just not the way we ordinarily settle such disputes. The point of having moral principles in a community is not only to guide people's choices, but also to regulate their conduct. When we are placed in such a situation where we have to pass a value judgment like "so and so ought to do this and this", we do not consider whether the implications of this judgment conflict with our inclination or not; rather what we look for is a corresponding moral principle which can 'warrant' our judgment.

Consider, for example, another situation: B, my friend has lost something. I happen to know that it has been stolen by A. I also know that if I let B know the fact of A's having stolen it, B will have him put into prison. Now I have to make a decision whether to tell B the truth or to keep quiet. Suppose, I hypothetically decide "I ought to tell B the truth about A". This judgment according to Hare entails a universal judgment, "Anyone in a situation like mine ought to tell the truth." This universal judgment entails another singular prescription about me to the effect that if I steal something, and if anyone knew it, then he ought to tell the truth

about my having stolen that thing. Can I accept a value-judgment to this effect? Following Hare's argument, I cannot because of my strong inclination against going to prison. But, if I cannot accept the singular prescription about myself, I am committed to withdrawing my original judgment "I ought to tell B the truth about A". But, if I withdraw this judgment, it amounts to making another decision to the effect that I ought not to tell B the truth about A". Will I be morally justified in making such a decision? Almost every society recognizes the principle "One ought to speak the truth." We are taught from the very childhood to obey such rules; and going against such rules is regarded immoral. That, I have a strong inclination against going to prison does not justify my decision "I ought not to tell B the truth about A." In almost every person's life there arise situations (even where the interests of only a limited number of people are involved) in which their inclinations conflict with what they, as members of a community, may be morally required to do, but if they give way to their inclinations the very purpose of having a moral code will be defeated. It is not to suggest that moral principles do not admit of exceptions. At times, we do go against a certain moral rule, but when it happens it happens not because of our inclinations, but because either the required line of action conflicts with another duty, or the facts of the situation are such that they disable the agent from doing the proposed action.

However, let us accept for the moment Hare's claim that when a certain judgment is found conflicting with "inclination", we cannot

accept it. In the creditor-debtor example, Hare gives importance to A's inclination against going to prison. But when A makes the judgment "I ought to put B into prison because he will not pay me what he owes", he has another inclination, opposed to the first one, i. e., the inclination against letting B get away with his money. Why must A decide in favour of the inclination against going to prison, and not against letting B get away with his money? Hare cannot say that A can't have such an inclination, - for we do have such inclinations when put in such situations. A possible answer that Hare might think of would be that A's inclination against going to prison is stronger than his inclination against letting B get away with his money. However, this will not do. A can evade the force of his inclination against going to prison by giving the following considerations: The singular prescription "I ought to be put into prison if I were somebody's insolvent debtor" concerns A not immediately but refers to a possible future situation. But the judgment "I ought to put B into prison because he will not pay me what he owes" concerns A immediately because, if he withdraws this judgment and hence abandons his decision to put B into prison, he will loose his money which he will not like. This additional factor of his having another opposed inclination which is immediately relevant to him will override his inclination against going to prison. This would mean that A can pass the value-judgment "I ought to put B into prison" knowing full well his own inclination against going to prison.

There is yet another factor the consideration of which will weaken the force of A's inclination against going to prison. What A was required to do in Hare's example was to put himself in the hypothetical situation where he is somebody's insolvent debtor. Now, suppose, A is confident that the antecedent of the judgment "I ought to be put into prison, if I were somebody's insolvent debtor" is never going to materialize. This would make a considerable difference. The force of his inclination against going to prison, then, would not have the same impact on A which it could have had had he not been confident that the antecedent would not materialize. This being so A can accept the singular prescription about himself "I ought to be put into prison if I were somebody's insolvent debtor" and consequently decide "I ought to put B into prison because he will not pay me what he owes."

The creditor-debtor example was designed by Hare to show how we resolve an ethical dispute where the interests of only two people are involved. In chapter seven of Freedom and Reason, entitled "Utilitarianism", Hare considers another case where more than two persons are involved. Hare imagines a judge-criminal case where the judge is to sentence the criminal to imprisonment for what he has done. We shall refer to it as the judge-criminal example; and since Hare acknowledges that the sort of considerations involved in the judge-criminal example have affinities with traditional utilitarianism, we shall call it the utilitarian argument. Hare's claim is that the utilitarian argument is an extension of the argument considered in the previous section. We have seen that in the creditor-debtor example A, according to Hare, could not universalize the judgment because

of his inclination. Hare considers a possible objection against the judgment of the judge. The criminal might object to the judge's pronouncement reminding him of his own inclination against going to prison. Thus, the criminal might argue: "You would not like to be sent to the prison, if you were me, and therefore you cannot universalize your prescription. But if you cannot universalize your prescription, then how can you pass a judgment to the effect that I ought to be imprisoned?" Hare, however, thinks that the judge can justify his stand on the ground that in this case, unlike the creditor-debtor example, interests of many persons are involved. And, therefore, he (the judge) has to consider not only his own and the criminal's inclinations, but also the interests of all those members of the community who will be affected by his decision. Thus, the judge can reply: "If it were just you and I, then of course I might not feel obliged to send you to prison. But I am considering the people whom you will rob, and those other people, who encouraged by your example, will rob, if I don't put you in prison, and I find it easier to universalize the maxim that thieves should be put into prison."⁴⁷ Now, admitted that the judge has thus justified his stand, but the question, then, arises why the creditor in the previous example cannot universalize his prescription. A, the creditor, can argue as the judge argues in the present argument that he has not only to consider his interest but also the interests of all those from whom B would borrow money and would not return. And, that, if he does not put B into prison in order to make him pay what he owes, other people may feel encouraged to behave in

47. Freedom and Reason, p. 117.

the same way. And, that if such lapses were allowed, it would considerably affect the life of all the members of the society since other people, following B's example, will also not care to pay what they borrow. And, therefore, in order to stop such behaviour, he should universalize the judgment. This way A can build up a good case in favour of universalizing his prescription, and Hare should have no objection to it, since it has been shown that in the creditor-debtor example, interests of not only two people are involved, but of all the members of a society. This shows that either the utilitarian argument cannot be universalized, or Hare has to agree that in every situation, irrespective of the fact about one's inclination, a moral judgment can be universalized. If Hare agrees to the latter, the consequences would be fantastic. Consider, for instance, the prodigious implications (for many if not for all members of a society) of the universalization of judgments like the following:

1. I ought to be insincere about my work.
2. I ought to be discourteous to my elders.

Hare cannot object to the universalisation of such judgments on the ground of the immorality or the moral unbecomingness of them since he claims to be indifferent as to the choice of a particular moral code. This indifference is a direct result of his contention that his system does not commit him to any moral code (or point of view).

Now, on the other hand, if he decides to grasp the other horn of the dilemma, then, on his own admission, moral arguments break down.

CHAPTER FIFTH

The Good Reason Approach to Moral Arguments (II):

Kurt Baier

In the Third chapter we introduced the good-reason approach to moral arguments. Baier adopts lines somewhat similar to those suggested by Toulmin in his "conceptual analysis" of moral reasoning. It would be recalled that for Toulmin the central problem in ethics was to lay down the criteria for determining whether a set of reasons, or a reason, is a good reason. Such criteria were required in order to distinguish valid ethical arguments from invalid ones. Toulmin provided the criteria of good reasons in terms of the prevalent practices in one's community and the principle of preventing avoidable sufferings to other members of the community. For Baier, too, in moral justification, one is called upon to show whether the agent has taken the best course of action open to him, by showing that the best reasons are in its support because the best course of action is the one which is supported by the best reasons.¹ And, in order to show that a certain reason R is the best reason in support of an action Y, we need a criterion or a set of criteria. Thus, both Toulmin and Baier are concerned with formulating

1. Cf. Kurt Baier, The Moral Point of View; Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 1958, p. 88.

criteria for good reasons. But this initial similarity in the strategy of their approaches should not lead one to think that both of them are giving similar models for moral arguments. Paradoxically enough, this similarity is of little importance when we consider the contrary nature of their analyses. For Toulmin, moral reasoning is non-deductive, whereas for Baier, it is strictly deductive. For Toulmin, to say that 'R is the best reason in support of 'Y' is not the same as saying 'Y ought to be done', whereas for Baier both the expressions are equivalent. In this respect Baier is closer to Hare than he is to Toulmin - for, both Hare and Baier regard moral arguments as strictly deductive. Toulmin would have no objection to Hare's claim that no value judgment can be derived (analytically) from purely factual premises. Baier, on the contrary, seems to suggest that moral arguments are not only deductive, but also that a value judgment can be derived from factual premises. In short, his analysis bears close resemblance as well as sharp contrast to the analyses presented by Toulmin and Hare. He would agree with Hare that moral-reasoning is deductive and, hence disagree with Toulmin that it is non-deductive. But he would disagree with Hare with regard to the nature of moral judgment and the relationship between a value judgment and factual premises in an ethical argument. However, before we come to explain in detail his analysis of moral argument it is important to report briefly what according to him is the nature of value judgment. It is important

because his analysis mainly rests on his view that value judgments can be true or false, and hence verifiable.

1. Nature of Value Judgment:

In the preface of The Moral Point of View, Baier claims that it is one of the main logical features of moral judgments that they can be mutually contradictory. It is so because they are "fact-stating". They are judgments to the effect that a certain course of action is morally right or morally wrong. Such judgments have a "logical bearing on what should be done".² He holds that "judgments to the effect that something is legal or illegal, just or unjust, good or bad, right or wrong, are directly relevant to answering the question "what shall I do?"³ Thus, Baier would agree with Hare that moral judgments are answers to the practical question "what shall I do?" but would disagree with Hare on the point that only a command can be an appropriate answer to such a question. When a person asks someone "what shall I do?" what he wants is not a command but advice as to what he should do. He wants his hearer to think and deliberate about the problem on his behalf. He wants to know what would be the best thing for him to do. Baier writes:

Practical judgments are answers to the question 'what shall I do?' but it does not follow from this that they are commands. Practical judgments are indeed designed to guide us, but it does not follow from this that they cannot be true or false. . . . Practical judgments can guide us and they can be true or false.⁴

2. Ibid., p. 55.

3. Ibid., pp. 55-56.

4. Ibid., p. 57.

Baier's claim that moral judgments are 'fact-stating' and empirically verifiable is quite significant for his treatment of moral reasoning. By regarding them as 'fact-stating', he on the one hand weakens the dichotomy between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, and on the other, meets the charge of committing the naturalistic fallacy. Moral judgments are not descriptive; nevertheless, they are 'claim-making'. They are claim-making in the sense that they involve giving correct answers to questions of the form, 'Is it right or wrong?'. Furthermore, since in his scheme value judgments are fact-stating, the question of committing the naturalistic fallacy would not arise, for, a value-fact-stating judgment, he would argue, is derivable from fact stating statements.

2. Value Comparisons and Rankings:

Value judgments are according to him "either comparisons or rankings - either assertions to the effect that one thing, event, state of affairs, person, or deed, is better or worse than, or as good or bad as, another, or assertions to the effect that one thing, event, etc., is good, bad or just average."⁵ Value rankings and comparisons differ from factual rankings and comparisons because of their respective functions. In non-value comparisons and rankings our concern is to describe a certain thing. That is, in what degree things ranked or compared possess a certain property. Such a description enables others to 'identify'

5. Ibid. pp. 57-58.

it and formulate laws about it.⁶ Whereas, in value comparisons and rankings, our purpose is "to give rational guidance."⁷ However, this difference in their respective purpose does not, Baier argues, preclude value comparisons and rankings from being empirically verifiable. The logical requirements in comparing and ranking, whether evaluative or non-evaluative, are the same. When we rank a certain thing, our concern is only with the one object which is being ranked. In comparing, on the other hand, we compare two objects with each other in order to know "which of the two objects has a given property to a higher degree."⁸ In order to verify a certain ranking, as for instance, "X is a tall man," we require a standard of tallness with reference to which X has been ranked. In both value and non-value rankings certain standards are implied. The claim that X is a tall man can be understood only when some standard is admitted. However, it does not mean that the standard of tallness is fixed. The standard of tallness would differ from case to case, in each of which the predicate 'tall' is attributed. Thus, the assertions "This pygmy is tall", "This man is tall", "This child is tall", "This horse is tall" are all making the same claim about different objects Yet the empirical verification of these claims involves a different factor everytime, namely the appropriate standard of tallness"⁹.

6. Cf. "Moral Point of View, p. 73.

7. Ibid. p. 73.

8. Ibid. p. 59

9. Ibid. p. 60.

In comparing, unlike ranking, no standard is involved. We do not need any "standard" in order to assert that 'X is taller than Y'. We just compare X and Y. Criteria may, however, be involved in both comparing and ranking.

Verification of factual ranking or comparison is done with reference to the standard or criteria employed. But in case of the verification of value comparison and ranking, according to Baier, an additional question regarding the validation of the standards and criteria arises. That is, in case of a value judgment, we not only verify it with reference to the standard or the criterion used, but we are also required to validate the criterion itself, i.e. is the criterion used in making the judgment the right criterion? Baier's claim is that if "we agree on the criteria to be employed, then value judgments can be empirically verified in exactly the same way as non-evaluative comparisons and rankings."¹⁰ Nonetheless, the "characteristic disagreements" in ethics, for Baier, concern the rightness of the criterion in making a value judgment. And, therefore, value judgments, according to him, "must not only be verified but also be validated"¹¹ "It is not enough to show that if certain criteria are employed, then a thing must be said to have a certain degree of "goodness"; we must also show that these criteria ought to be employed."¹² Thus, the important difference between the verification of evaluative comparisons and rankings and

10. *Ibid.* p. 75.

11. *Ibid.* p. 75.

12. *Ibid.* p. 75.

non-evaluative ones consists, according to him, in the fact that in the case of value judgments the criteria used are also to be validated, whereas, in the case of factual rankings and comparisons, this question does not arise.

3. A Conceptual Analysis of Reason in Ethics:

With the above sketch of what Baier thinks of the nature of value judgments, let us now turn to his analysis of moral reasoning, which according to him consists in comparing courses of action open to us. For "practical reasoning is... answering the value question 'which is the best course open to me?'"¹³ The best course of action, Baier holds, is one which is supported by the best reasons. Thus, a study of moral-reasoning would involve a conceptual analysis of reasons. Baier in this connection formulates three problems¹⁴ which he thinks a conceptual analysis of reason in ethics must deal with. Firstly how do we tell what is in accordance with or contrary to reason? Secondly, why do people act in accordance with reason? And, thirdly, why should people do what is in accordance with reason and refrain from doing what is contrary to it? At the moment we shall discuss Baier's answer to the first of these questions.

(a) How do we tell what is in accordance with or contrary to reason? :

When we are faced with alternative courses of action, we "deliberate" as to which one of the alternatives has the "weightiest"

13. Ibid., 84.

14. Cf. Moral Point of View: p. 89.

reasons in its support. In our deliberation, we first "survey" the facts of the situation in order to determine which of the considerations support the proposed line of action and which of them go against it. Secondly, we weigh these considerations in order to decide which course of action has the weightiest reasons in its support. In surveying the facts of the situation, we consider all the pros and cons of the proposed action. That is, we determine whether a certain fact of the situation is in favour or against it. In doing so, we are guided by what Baier calls, "rules of reason", or "consideration making beliefs." By a consideration making-belief, he means, "propositions to the effect that if a line of action is of a certain sort then the agent has a reason for or against entering on it"¹⁵ The consideration making beliefs consist of the group-convictions, prevalent practices, customs etc., which we learn as members of our community. It is on the basis of the consideration making beliefs that we come to regard certain facts as reasons in support of doing something, and certain facts as reasons against doing it. That selling the car is in my interest is a reason for me to sell it because of the following consideration making belief; The fact that doing something is in my interest is a reason for doing it. We accept consideration making beliefs as facts which are not person-relative but are shared by all the members of one's community. Therefore, they are not true or false for some particular individual. "They are simply true or false"¹⁶ A fact which comes to be regarded

15. Ibid. p. 94.

16. Ibid. p. 98.

as a reason for or against the proposed course of action is always in relation to some particular person in a particular context." For a given fact is a reason only because it is a reason for a particular person when deliberating about a number of alternative lines of action open to him."¹⁷

A consideration making belief, according to Baier, functions as the major premiss in an argument. The major premiss together with the minor premiss which states a fact of the situation function as reasons for the proposed course of action and imply the proposed course of action. As for instance, (borrowing Baier's example):

1. The fact that doing something would yield a high profit is a reason for doing it.
2. It would yield a high profit to sell my car to Paddy now.
3. Therefore, the fact that it would yield a high profit to sell my car to Paddy is a reason for selling it now.

The above argument offers a reason in favour of selling the car. Another argument may be constructed against it, offering reasons against selling the car.

1. The fact that doing something is illegal is a reason against doing it.
2. It would be illegal to sell my car to Paddy now.
3. Hence, the fact that selling it to Paddy now would be illegal is a reason against selling it now.

17. Ibid, p. 98.

In the above examples 1 alone is simply either true or false. But 1 and 2 taken together constitute a reason for or against the proposed action, and they are so for a particular person in a particular situation. Such reasons "presumptively imply the proposed course of action. Such a presumption can be confirmed or disconfirmed by 'weighing' the pros and cons. Baier distinguishes¹⁸ between 'presumptive reason'; 'prima facie reason', and 'reason on balance'. A 'presumptive reason' in Baier's scheme gives rise to a presumption that a given reason is a 'prima facie' reason. A prima facie reason gives rise to the presumption that a given reason is a 'reason on balance'. A prima facie reason supports a course of action "other things being equal". A 'reason on balance', on the other hand, conclusively establishes a given course of action as the best course of action" all things considered'.

The above quoted examples provide a model as to how we set about 'surveying' facts in order to consider pros and cons of the proposed action. After having surveyed the relevant facts both for and against we come to the second stage of our deliberation when we have to determine which consideration, or set of considerations, is the weightiest. The problem we are faced with is to decide which one of the alternative courses of action has the strongest reasons in its support.

18. Cf. Moral Point of View: Pp. 102-105.

Baier believes that just as we have consideration making beliefs, we also have "rules of superiority" in every society which determine the superiority of one set of reasons over the other.¹⁹ Thus, he points out that reasons of self interest are regarded superior to reasons of mere pleasure; reasons of law, morality and religion, are regarded superior to reasons of self interest.

Baier, besides making a gradation between different sorts of reasons, makes another distinction between 'individual rules of reason', 'social rules of reason' and 'moral rules of reason'. Individual rules of reason are either 'self-regarding' or 'other-regarding'. A self-regarding reason can be either short-range or long range. A self-regarding short range reason concerns a person's enjoyment and desires. If we find a certain activity "enjoyable", "pleasant" or "agreeable", it becomes a reason for doing it. Similarly, an action which brings satisfaction to an agent's desires is thought to be a reason for entering on that line of action. In brief, short range reasons are those which bring immediate satisfaction to an individual. Other regarding reasons, on the other hand, do not concern an individual's personal interests but are concerned with the interests of other persons.

In deliberation some considerations imply social rules. It is because of the existence of social rules that certain kinds of actions or behaviour are considered either objectionable or unobjectionable.²⁰

Coming to the moral considerations or moral rules of reason Baier defines

19. Cf. Moral Point of View, p. 99.

20. Cf. Moral Point of View, p. 136.

them as those "which occur in moral deliberation and the occurrence of which makes deliberation moral."²¹ Moral rules of reason or moral consideration making beliefs are, according to him, moral convictions such as "stealing is wrong". Moral deliberation is similar to deliberation in general. That is to say, the two stages involved in deliberation considered earlier are also involved in moral deliberation. "Moral deliberation is like all kinds of deliberation, is a sort of calculus, a method of reckoning, of working out something - which course of action is supported by the best moral reasons."²²

Moral convictions which function as moral rules of reason or moral consideration making beliefs can be true or false. It is an important claim that Baier makes. He would agree that moral convictions are imperativist, but insists that their imperative force does not debar them from being true or false. He writes:

My main contention is that we could not properly speak of morality, as opposed to a system of conventions, customs or laws, until the question of correctness or incorrectness, truth or falsity, of the rules prevalent in a community is asked, until, in other words, the prevalent rules are subjected to certain tests.²³

. . . only when the current rules are contrasted with other possible improved ideal rules, that a group can be said to have a morality as opposed to mere set of taboos. ²⁴

Thus, Baier would not compromise with the meta-ethicists who would regard basic principles of morality as underivable. He, however, holds, contrary to Hare, that adherence to the moral point of view is essential - "a person must adopt the moral point of view, if he is to be

21. Ibid. p. 169.

22. Ibid. p. 172.

23. Ibid. p. 174.

24. Ibid. p. 174.

moral."²⁵ And adopting the moral point of view means reviewing the facts in the light of one's moral convictions. Adopting the moral point of view is, however, not just accepting the moral convictions of a certain group. The truth of the adopted moral convictions, he holds, must also be established. The question, 'what shall I do?' is answered with reference to the defining conditions of the moral point of view.

Baier distinguishes between two sorts of defining conditions, viz. formal and material. The formal conditions are: (i) acting on moral principles, and (ii) the universality of moral principles²⁶. Baier further lays down three criteria of moral rules.²⁷ Firstly, they must not be "self-frustrating." A principle is self-frustrating if its purpose is frustrated the moment anyone starts acting on it. As for instance, the principle, 'when you are in need, ask for help, but never help another man if he is in need.' Such a principle, though not contradictory, is objectionable from the moral point of view. Secondly, the principle must not be "self-defeating". For Baier "A principle is self-defeating if its point is defeated as soon as a person lets it be known that he has adopted it."²⁸ For example, if one adopts a principle like 'Promise when you don't intend to keep it,' the very purpose of giving a promise is defeated - since its purpose is to furnish a guarantee to the promisee.' Thirdly, a principle must not be "morally impossible". A moral rule must be capable of being taught to everyone. But a morally impossible rule, as 'always assert what you think is not the case,' cannot be taught.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 184.

26. Cf. Moral Point of View, Pp. 196-99.

27. Cf. Moral Point of View, Pp. 196-200.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

If such a principle is adopted, it will either lead to a breaking down of communication, or require a change in the use of the word 'not'.

Besides the formal conditions, there is a material condition that the observation of the moral rule "should be for the good of everyone alike."²⁹ The criteria Baier prescribes for deciding whether a moral rule is good for everyone alike are two fold. First, confirmation to the 'absolute morality' point of view; and second confirmation to the social point of view. From the absolute morality point of view the criterion is summed up as follows: 'Don't do unto others as you would not have them do unto you.' To put it differently, what the criterion amounts to it that one should not behave to anybody in the manner which one would not like to have for oneself. That is to say, the behaviour exemplified by the moral rule must be "reversible". It must be acceptable to a person irrespective of whether he is doing the act concerned or he is one to whom the act is done. From the social point of view any behaviour is wrong if its consequences are undesirable; if everyone were equally free to enter on it even then it would be an indulgence and not a sacrifice.³⁰ Baier writes thus:

...The moral point of view is characterized by a formal and a material condition. The formal condition is this: a man cannot be said to have adopted the moral point of view unless he is prepared to treat the moral rules as principles, rather than mere rules of thumb, that is, to do things on principle, rather than merely to act purposively, merely to aim at a certain end. And, furthermore, he must act on rules which are meant for everybody, and not merely for himself or some favored group. The material condition is this: The rule must be for the good of everyone alike.³¹

29. *Ibid.*, p. 200.

30. *Cf. Moral Point of View*, p. 211.

31. *Ibid.*, pp. 207-8.

In order to complete the answer to the question 'How do we tell what is in accordance with reason or contrary to it?' it is essential to establish the truth of the consideration making belief. Baier's method of verifying a consideration making belief of an ethical argument is simple and straightforward. We have seen that a moral consideration making belief or moral conviction appears as the major premiss which, along with a factual statement about the situation implies a judgment. Baier's claim is that we can confirm the truth of the premises if we know that the argument is valid and the conclusion is true. That is to say, we can go to the truth of the consideration making belief from the truth of the conclusion and the validity of the argument in which the consideration making belief in question appears as the major premiss. He writes:

We can infer that the premiss is true if the argument is valid and if it is true that the course of action recommended in the conclusion of the argument is the best course open to the agent.³²

And to say that the course of action recommended by a moral judgment is the best course of action open to the agent is to say, in Baier's scheme, that the moral judgment in question is true. As he says:

In order to determine the truth of the conclusion, we have only to find out whether the recommended course of action is the best, other things being equal, that is, whether it is better than its contradictory or its contrary.³³

This can be exemplified as follows:

1. The fact that if I did X I would enjoy doing X is a reason for me to do X.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

2. I would enjoy doing X if I did X.
3. Therefore, I ought to do X (other things being equal).

The consideration making belief occurring in this argument as the major premise is, Baier thinks, the most elementary consideration making belief. The above argument, according to him, is a valid argument. What remains to be seen is whether the conclusion of this argument is true, that is, whether the judgment 'I ought to do X' is better than its contrary 'I ought not to do X', and its contradictory, 'It is not the case that I ought to do X.'

The problem is thus, reduced, according to Baier, to showing that the consideration making belief occurring in the above argument is better than its contrary and contradictory.³⁴

To show that the accepted consideration making belief is better than its contrary and contradictory is to show that its contrary and contradictory are either "self-frustrating", or "self-defeating" or "morally impossible" since these constitute the defining criteria of a moral rule. The contrary of the accepted consideration making belief would be "the fact that if I did X I would enjoy doing X is a reason for my not doing X." Obviously, on Baier's interpretation, this consideration making belief is self frustrating for it counsels that whenever I enjoy doing something, I ought not to do that. The criteria of best course of action are linked with what we mean by the good life. "In evaluating a life, one of the

34. Cf. Moral Point of View: p. 300.

criteria of merit which we use is how much satisfaction and how little frustration is there in that life. Our very purpose in "playing the reasoning game" is to maximize satisfaction and minimize frustration."³⁵

Similarly, the contradictory of the presently accepted consideration making belief is also less satisfactory. For, the contradictory, "the fact that if I did X I would enjoy doing X is not a reason for my doing X" neither tells me to do X nor does it explicitly stop me from doing X. This would mean that people who want to follow reason "would be neither advised to do what they would enjoy nor advised not to do it."³⁶ Baier sums up his discussion thus:

People who replace our most fundamental consideration making belief by its contrary or contradictory will not do as well as those who adhere to it. Those who adopt its contrary must even be said to be mad. This seems to me the best possible argument for the preferability of our fundamental consideration making belief to its contrary and its contradictory. And this amounts to a proof of its truth. I need not waste any further time on examining whether the other consideration making beliefs prevalent in our society are also true.³⁷

(b) Why do people act in accordance with reason?

The above discussion completes Baier's answer to the first question, i.e., How do we tell what is in accordance with or contrary to reason? The question 'what shall I do?' is interpreted by Baier as a question asking 'what is the best course of action?' Baier's pat answer is that the best course of action is the one which is supported by the best reasons.

35. *Ibid.*, p.301.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 303.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 304.

The problem of moral justification is here reduced to the problem of determining what is in accordance with or contrary to reason. This brings us to Baier's second question, 'why do people act in accordance with reason and refrain from doing what is contrary to it?' The question relates to the motive power of reason. How is it that reason has the power to move us to act in a certain way? Baier thinks that when we deliberate over "what shall I do?", we try to accomplish theoretical as well as practical tasks. The theoretical task is accomplished when we have got an answer to "what is the best course of action?" But the practical task still remains to be completed. It concerns acting "in accordance with the outcome of the theoretical"³⁸ task. Thus, the question, 'why do people act in accordance with reason and refrain from doing what is contrary to it?' concerns the practical task of deliberation.

In the first instance, Baier thinks, this question poses no serious difficulty. We act in accordance with reason "because we want to follow the best reasons"³⁹. The question 'what shall I do?' presupposes the questioner's tacit willingness to do what is in accordance with the outcome of his deliberation. Thus, the puzzle is "not why a man follows the best reasons"; rather the puzzle is, "why people should stop and think, to deliberate, to complete their theoretical tasks."⁴⁰ Baier's answer is that it is because of our socio-

38. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 318.

cultural training, because of our "upbringing", that we follow reason and refrain from doing what is contrary to it.

(c) Why should people do what is in accordances with reason?

All this finally takes us to the third problem 'why should people do what is in accordance with reason or refrain from doing what is contrary to it?' It is important to deal with this question - for unless we have proved that one ought to follow reason we cannot prove that we ought to follow the weightiest reasons. Baier's treatment of this question reminds us of Toulmin's discussion of the "Limiting question". Toulmin, as we have seen in chapter Third, labels the question 'why should I do what is right?' as a limiting question, meaning that such a question admits of no literal answer. Somewhat in a similar tone Baier argues that the question 'why should I follow reason?' is as silly as the question 'why is a circle a circle?' He paraphrases this question as "... I wish to do what is supported by the best reasons. Tell me whether doing what is supported by the best reasons is doing what is supported by the best reasons?"⁴¹ The question thus interpreted amounts to a "nonsensical" question. He writes:

The question 'why should I follow reason?' simply does not make sense. Asking it shows complete lack of understanding of the meaning of 'why questions'. 'Why should I do this?' is a request to be given the reason for saying that I should do this. It is normally asked when someone has already said, 'You should do this' and answered by giving the reason. But since 'should I follow reason?' means 'Tell me whether doing what is supported by the best reasons is doing what is supported by the best reasons', there is simply no possibility of adding 'why?' For the question

41. Ibid, p. 318.

now comes to this, 'Tell me the reason why doing what is supported by the best reasons is doing what is supported by the best reasons.' It is exactly like asking, 'why is a circle a circle?'⁴²

Baier, however, also gives a second interpretation to the question. 'Why should I follow reason?' may be taken, he holds, as a "request for a reason why one should enter on the theoretical task of the deliberation."⁴³ Thus, what the question now comes to is, whether one should do moral deliberation at all. The question so formulated becomes a meaningful question. And, Baier's answer to this is in the positive. One should enter moral deliberation because "Deliberation is the only reliable method. Even if there were other reliable methods we could only tell whether they were reliable by checking them against this method."⁴⁴

4. Critical Appraisal:

Baier, like Toulmin, rejects the principal traditional theories. His discontent with the Traditional Schools is, as we have noted, on four major scores: Firstly, whether or not moral judgments can be mutually contradictory; secondly, whether or not they are action guiding; thirdly, whether or not there are good reasons why one should do what is morally right and not its opposite; and fourthly, whether we know what is morally right or wrong or we do not? His answers to the above four questions are in the affirmative and he goes on to claim that an adequate theory must

42. Ibid., p. 318.

43. Ibid., p. 318.

44. Ibid., p. 319.

account for all these features. None of the traditional approaches does justice to these four aspects of morality; hence, they are considered inadequate. Baier's claim is that his theory answers all these four questions satisfactorily. Consequently, he claims (i) that moral judgments state natural facts, hence, they can be mutually contradictory; (ii) that, moral judgments can be true or false, and, moral arguments valid or invalid; (iii) that, an ethical judgment can be deduced from factual premises, and (iv) that, in a moral argument, a moral judgment which occurs as the conclusion is entailed by the premises of the argument. In short, he proposes an analytic model for moral reasoning. In what follows, I shall examine the adequacy of these claims in the light of his proposed model of moral argumentation.

According to Baier to know which action is right or which is wrong is to know which action is supported by the weightiest reasons. In ethical arguments one uses certain fundamental ethical propositions as major premises. These fundamental ethical propositions function as 'consideration making beliefs, 'rules of reason' or 'moral convictions' also. The verification of these consideration making beliefs is necessary in order to determine which course of action is supported by the strongest of reasons. But, the procedure that Baier presents for determining the truth of a consideration making belief is faulty. Let us consider an example of a practical argument:

1. The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me to do x .
2. I would enjoy doing x .
3. Therefore, I ought to do x (other things being equal).

In the above argument 1 states a consideration making belief. That 3 is supported by a good reason depends upon the truth of 1. If 1 is true then 3 is correct and if 1 is false then 3 has no good reason in support of it. Baier's maxim for determining the truth of 1 is that "Premises of an argument are true if the argument is valid and the conclusion is true."⁴⁵

Thus, in order to decide whether the fundamental proposition (consideration making belief) is true, we have to determine the validity of the argument and the truth of the conclusion. That 1 is true, if the argument of which 1 is the major premise is valid, and, 3 is true. The criterion of validity which Baier has in mind is the one applied to deductive arguments. But the criterion for determining the truth of the consideration making beliefs as suggested by Baier is incorrect, for the premises of a valid argument may false, and those of an invalid argument be true. A valid argument is generally defined as one in which it is impossible to accept the premises and reject the conclusion. That is, in a valid argument, in accepting the premises one is logically committed to accepting the conclusion too. From the truth of the conclusion and the validity of

45. The Moral Point of View; p. 299.

the argument, therefore, no truth-claim can be made about the premises. A true proposition is implied by any proposition whatsoever and a false proposition implies any proposition whatsoever. It is elementary. Baier, however, violates this elementary rule of logic. This slip on Baier's part has far reaching consequences. For, if his criterion for determining the truth of consideration making beliefs is not workable, then there is no other way of doing it. And, if we cannot determine the truth of consideration making beliefs, we can never tell, accepting Baier's system whether or not a course of action is actually supported by the best of reasons.

If, on the other hand, Baier is not using the term 'validity' in the strictly formal sense, the sense in which it is used in deductive logic, then he should have specified the sense in which he is using it. On the contrary, there is no evidence to think that he is not using 'valid' in its formal sense. The criterion for determining the truth of the consideration making beliefs, hence, cannot be accommodated within the logical scheme of his system.

Independent of the above difficulty, his criterion is circular too. Let us restate his criterion: 'Premises of an argument are true if the argument is valid and the conclusion is true.' The difficulty arises when one comes to establishing the truth of the conclusion. He says, "In order to determine the truth of the conclusion, we have only to find out whether the recommended course of action is the best."⁴⁶ And to

46. Ibid., p. 299.

say that the recommended course of action is the best is to say, according to him, that it is better than its contradictory or contrary. Therefore in the example given above, the conclusion (I ought to do x) is true if it is better than its contrary (I ought not to do x) or contradictory (It is not the case that I ought to do x). The trouble with Baier's system begins when one tries to decide whether or not a given judgment is better than its contrary or contradictory. The contrary of 'I ought to do x' is (according to Baier), 'I ought not to do x'. How to know which one of the two judgments is true? The actual comparison, in Baier's system, is not between these two opposing judgments; it is rather in their supporting reasons. Thus, to be able to say that 'I ought to do x' is better than its contrary one has to accept that the reasons in support of 'I ought to do x' are weightier than the reasons in support of 'I ought not to do x'. That is to say, the consideration making belief 'The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me to do x' is better than its contrary, 'The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me not to do x'. But to say that one consideration making belief, say A, is better than its contrary or contradictory is to say that A is true, because according to Baier if a certain statement P is better than its contrary or contradictory then P is true. This is where circularity is involved. For, in order to know that a certain fundamental ethical proposition (consideration making belief) is true, we are told, we have to decide that the conclusion of the argument in which the given consideration making belief appears as a major

premise, is true. But to be able to determine that the conclusion is true, one has to decide that the consideration making belief is better than its contrary or contradictory. Thus, when we apply Baier's criterion, we find that in an ethical argument, the truth of the premises is grounded in the truth of the conclusion and truth of the conclusion is grounded in that of the premises. In the context of the example of the practical argument given above, the major premise (The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me to do x) is true if the conclusion (I ought to do x) is true. But the conclusion is true if the major premise is true. In order to know the truth of the conclusion, we should already know the truth of the major premise. Now, if we cannot establish the truth of a consideration making belief independently, without making it depend upon the truth of the conclusion of the argument, then Baier's criterion for determining the truth of the premises has no use.

There are also difficulties with regard to his notion of the truth and falsity of ethical judgments. It is one of the major claims of Baier that 'true' and 'false' are applicable to ethical judgments. According to Baier the truth of a moral conviction consists in its being a reason in moral deliberation. In his own words - "We are now asking whether this widely held belief is true, whether this fact really is a reason or merely believed to be so."⁴⁷

47. Ibid., p. 299.

Thus, a certain moral conviction can be counted as true if it can be admitted as a reason in an ethical argument. But if the truth of a moral conviction is believed to consist merely in its being a reason, then any moral conviction which can be entered as the major premise in an ethical argument would be true. The sentence, "The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me not to do x " is as true as its contrary, "The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me to do x ". Both can be entered as major premises in arguments. If it is in this sense that Baier claims truth or falsity of ethical expressions, then his conception of 'truth' is astoundingly trivial. Baier might say that the sentence "The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me not to do x " is not actually a reason but merely believed to be so. But this sentence does actually provide a reason for the judgment, "I ought not to do x " Baier would, probably, like to qualify that a moral conviction can be genuinely entertained as a reason if it is better than its contrary or contradictory. This, however, yields a peculiar notion of "truth" as "best" If in a certain case the best course of action, therefore, the best (available) consideration making belief is true - then not-best becomes not true or false. But, 'best' admits of three degrees as against the two values of truth. What is not best may not be worst, but what is not true is certainly false.

Stevenson⁴⁸, we have seen, rightly points out that the word 'true' has a strictly formal sense in the context of deductive reasoning. The formal sense of 'true' cannot be divorced from the formal sense of the word 'valid'. Both are interconnected. Therefore, if 'valid' is being used in its formal sense, then 'true' has also to be used in its formal sense. In Baier's system the notions of 'contrariety' and 'contradiction' play important roles. Both are logical notions and Baier is using them in their formal senses. However, he is using the word 'true' in an altogether different sense - a sense which is completely incompatible with the normal use of 'valid', 'contrariety' and 'contradiction'. He is using 'true' more in its idiomatic sense than in its formal sense. Baier might say that, 'true' when used in the context of ethical statements, means the best. He may be right. But he cannot then use 'valid' 'contradiction' and 'true' in two logically incompatible senses. Either he has to give up his deductive model of ethical arguments or use 'true' in the sense in which it is used in formal logic. Baier does not actually succeed in controverting the claim of those who deny the application of 'true' and 'false' to ethical expressions because he changes the meaning of 'true'.

Technically speaking, the structure of ethical argument as suggested by Baier is itself faulty. He deduces, "I ought to do x (other things being equal)", from the premises "The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me to do x" and "I would enjoy doing x". But by no rule of

48Cf. Stevenson, Ethics and Language, pp. 154-55.

inference such a deduction is possible. From the said premises, using the rule of Modus Ponens, one can infer only "There is a reason for me to do x" and not "I ought to do x". "I ought to do x" can be inferred if an argument of the following form is constructed.

1. If there is a reason for me to do x then I ought to do x.
2. There is a reason for me to do x.
3. Therefore I ought to do x.

Baier does not employ any such argument. However, in his system, 'the best thing to do' means 'the course supported by the best reasons'. Unfortunately he does not argue how these two phrases are synonymous. But taking Baier on his words our practical argument would be as follows:

1. The fact that if I did x I would enjoy doing x is a reason for me to do x.
2. I would enjoy doing x.
3. Hence, there is a reason for me to x.
4. Therefore, x is the best thing for me to do.

In this argument again we don't get the desired conclusion, "I ought to do x". What is the relationship between the expression "X is the best thing for me to do" and the expression, "I ought to do x"? Unless a logical link between these two expressions is provided, Baier's deductive model of ethical arguments remains inadequate. Are these two expressions synonymous? Baier does not say so. Does the expression

"x is the best thing to do" entail the expression "I ought to do x". He does not say this either. The most that he says is that "the criteria of best course of action are linked with what we mean by the good life".⁴⁹ But in what way are the criteria of the best course of action linked with the good life? Baier has no satisfactory answer.

Even if Baier succeeds in finding some semblance of an answer to the above difficulties, there is yet another difficulty which is of paramount importance. This is regarding the kind of moral code Baier is describing. I doubt the existence in any society of such a well structured, explicitly enunciated moral code equipped with consideration making beliefs and rules of priority as envisaged by Baier. He seems to take for granted the existence of such a moral code. However, as far as my knowledge goes - there is no such code in any society whatsoever, civilized or tribal. The nearest approximation to the kind of code Baier requires is a legal system. But Baier, cannot consistently accept any system of laws as moral. For he is averse to having his moral convictions formulated in legal lingo. He holds that "the concept of law does not fit the core of morality Morality, therefore, cannot be any sort of law."⁵⁰ But all this is peripheral and a matter of empirical investigation. The question central to the difficulty is that even if such a code existed - what kind of a code would it be? While discussing the methods of establishing the truth of consideration making beliefs, Baier writes:

49. Moral Point of View; p. 304.

50. Ibid, pp. 177-78.

To sum up. People who replace our most fundamental consideration-making belief by its contrary or contradictory will not do as well as those who adhere to it. Those who adopt its contrary must even be said to be mad. This seems to me the best possible argument for the preferability of our fundamental consideration making belief to its contrary and contradictory. And this amounts to a proof of its truth. I need not waste any further time on examining whether the other consideration making beliefs prevalent in our society are also true.⁵¹

It follows from the above passage that the consideration making beliefs prevalent in any society are all true. And, therefore, in moral deliberation one has got to, if one is not preferring madness to normalcy, use consideration-making beliefs as major premises in arguments. In the final analysis "prevalence" functions as the distinguishing mark of true moral rules. But if we can never go against the prevalent moral convictions, can there ever be development in the moral code of a society? Would the moral code not be completely static? The contrary or contradictory of a prevalent moral consideration making belief is ever doomed to be declared worse than the prevalent one. This leaves no room for any social reform, any improvement in the existing system of morals. But this is neither the case nor desirable. Baier in his system fails to account for the dynamic character of a moral code.

51. Ibid., p. 304.

CHAPTER SIXTH

CONCLUSION

In the previous chapters I have explained and examined some of the chief views about the nature of moral reasoning. The basic questions of our enquiry were: How do we defend an ethical judgment whose truth is challenged? What is the nature of the reasons given in favour or against an ethical judgment, and in what way are the supporting reasons related to the judgment? The problem before us, in short, is to explicate the nature of the inference involved in moral reasoning. The fundamental disagreement amongst the ethicists considered here centers around the question: Whether a deductive frame of argument is adequate to account for moral reasoning, or does moral reasoning have its own mode different from both deductive and inductive types? Stevenson and Toulmin, for instance, think that moral reasoning cannot be explained in terms of deductive logic; whereas Hare and Baier regard moral reasoning as completely deductive. An answer to this question would largely depend upon how we define a deductive argument. If analyticity of the relationship between the premises and the conclusion in an argument is considered as the defining characteristic of deductive arguments, then ethical arguments are certainly not deductive. It is so because the relationship between the

supporting reasons and the ethical judgment in an ethical argument is not as rigorous as it is in arguments which are normally characterized as deductive. That is to say in an ethical argument the conclusion does not analytically follow from the premises. But if a certain amount of looseness in the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is permissible within the framework of deductive arguments, then ethical arguments can also be regarded as deductive. The disagreement amongst the ethicists is, thus, essentially about the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of an ethical argument. Stevenson and Toulmin both hold that an ethical judgment is inferred from factual premises, and therefore they are logically committed to holding that the relationship between non value premises and a value judgment is not analytic, since a value judgment is logically different from a non value judgment. Hare and Baier, on the other hand, regard the relationship between the premises and the conclusion in an ethical argument as analytic. But for Hare, every valid ethical argument must contain a moral principle as the major premise, in which case the conclusion cannot assert anything which is not implicitly asserted in the premises. Baier holds that an ethical judgment is analytically inferred from factual premises but he finds no logical difference between a value judgment and a non-value judgment.

Thus, the denial that ethical arguments are deductive primarily hinges on the assertion that a value judgment is inferred from factual

premises and that value judgments and factual judgments are logically different. Whereas the assertion that ethical arguments are deductive primarily rests on the assertion that no value judgment can be inferred from purely factual premises or that both value judgments and factual judgments belong to the same category.

There are, however, some thinkers¹ who maintain, on the one hand, that moral reasoning is deductive and, on the other hand, that the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of an ethical argument is not as determined or rigorous as it is in non ethical deductive arguments. Prasad for instance holds that the justification of singular moral judgment consists in showing that, "it is an instance of a maxim (or principle)."² He, like Hare, writes: "If made explicit, the reasoning will consist of some maxim (or maxims), some factual statement (or statements) stating the facts of the case, and the moral judgment in question as a consequence of theirs. The argument will claim to show that the facts of the case are such that the maxim applies to them and therefore the moral judgment in question is justified."³ He thinks of moral arguments as enthymematic in character (where the major premise is hidden). However, unlike Hare and Baier, he holds that a moral judgment is not entailed by the premises of the argument.

1. Cf. Rajendra Prasad, "Justification In Ethics". The Indian Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1959.

2. Ibid, p. 6.

3. Ibid, p. 6-7.

He writes:

It is because of the important role human decision plays in it that ethical reasoning becomes less rigorous than scientific reasoning. It is clearly not as rigorous as formal reasoning where decision plays (almost) no part. It is not, therefore, proper to say that in a moral argument the premises entail the conclusion. In ascertaining whether one proposition entails another proposition the element of decision plays no significant role because the entailment relations between propositions are controlled by clear-cut and rigorous rules of inference. It may be that we can present an ethical argument in a syllogistic form, but it remains true that in it the relationship between premises and conclusion is not as mechanical or determined as in non-ethical arguments.⁴

I entirely agree with the view that in ethical reasoning the inference is not as strict as it is in non-ethical argument. It is so because of the choice element involved in making moral decisions. In an argument where the inference is strict or determined, it is impossible for me to accept the premises and reject the conclusion. But in case of moral reasoning it would not be a contradiction to accept a moral rule "Every one ought to keep one's promises" and the factual statement, "A promised to do Y" but not accept the judgment, "A ought to do Y." Such situations are not rare, if not frequent, in one's moral life. Both Hare and Baier conceive of moral reasoning as strictly formal in nature. Both regard the relationship between the premises and the conclusion in an ethical argument as that of entailment. We have already discussed⁵ the shortcomings of their analyses. On their analyses it is difficult to account for the choice factor which is essential to a moral decision. Hare is, indeed, right in holding that no value judgment

4. Ibid. p. 12.

5. Supra, pp. 99-112; and pp. 132-42.

can be entailed by non value premises. But he presents a model of ethical arguments which it is difficult to work with. Following the pattern of moral reasoning as formulated by him, it turns out that either any moral judgment, for example, "I ought to be discourteous to my elders" can be universalized in which case any moral judgment can be justified, or contrary to his claim the utilitarian argument cannot universalized in which case ethical arguments, on his own admission, break down. Besides, we have seen that Hare's claim that moral judgments are universalizable is inconsistent with his adherence to Hume's law that no moral judgment can be derived (analytically) from statements of fact alone. The universalizability thesis inescapably commits him to accepting that there is atleast one instance in which a value judgment is "entailed" by factual premises. Hare has only two alternatives: either he gives up supporting Hume's law, or withdraws his universalizability thesis. But if he gives up Hume's law his entire thesis changes radically. And if he withdraws his universalizability thesis then on his theory ethical justification becomes impossible. For according to him, if a value judgment is not universalizable it ceases to be a value judgment and consequently it cannot be justified either.

Baier like Hare, proposes an analytic model of moral reasoning. Though his analysis is not like Hare's, yet he also regards that to relationship between the premises and the conclusion in an ethical argument is that of entailment. Though they seem to be making contradictory

claims -- Hare maintaining that no value judgment can be derived from non value premises and Baier holding that a value judgment is derived from factual premises. Yet these seemingly contradictory claims are not actually contradictory. Hare makes a logical distinction between value judgments and factual judgments which Baier does not. For Baier ethical judgments state facts. Therefore, his claim that a value judgment is derived from factual premises does not really contradict Hare's denial of it.

However, difficulties more or less similar to those that we encounter in Hare's analysis creep up in Baier's analysis too. Baier's main objective is to distinguish between good and bad reasons in ethics. But the procedure that he delineates in order to do this, we have found to be completely unworkable. We have seen that in Baier's theory, establishing the truth of the consideration making beliefs is most crucial for determining whether or not a given course of action is supported by the best of reasons. The whole purpose of his analytic model of moral reasoning is defeated if we are not able to verify the consideration making beliefs which function as major premises in ethical arguments. We have shown⁶ that Baier fails to provide a logically adequate criterion to determine the truth of the consideration making beliefs.

The difficulties which we have faced in the analyses of Hare and Baier are primarily due to the type of models they construe to explain the nature of moral reasoning. They try to import into ethical

6. Supra, pp. 132-37.

arguments the rigour of formal arguments. However, the rigour of formal arguments is due to the rigorous rules of inference applied therein. Where one proposition is entailed by another proposition, the element of decision is completely absent. In accepting one proposition, one is logically committed to accepting the other. But ethical arguments cannot have the rigour of formal arguments simply because moral commitment is not logical commitment. A moral commitment is a matter of choice and decision which logical commitment is not. Therefore, certain amount of looseness will always be present in the relationship between premises and the conclusion of an ethical argument.

However, if it is accepted that the inference in ethical arguments is not rigorous or determined as in non-ethical deductive arguments, then it is difficult to understand in what significant sense can ethical arguments be characterized as deductive. Prasad is indeed right in saying that 'it is not proper to say that in a moral argument the premises entail the conclusion'. But the point is whether the looseness in the relationship between the premises and the conclusion of ethical arguments can be accommodated within the net work of formal rules of inference. I donot think that this peculiar feature of ethical arguments can be accounted for in terms of formal logic. The rules of inference of a deductive system are completely mechanical in their application because the conditions of their application are specified fully. Therefore it is in their very nature to yield only rigorous inference. Hence, those

rules cannot be applied in the realm of moral reasoning.

We have already seen that the methods of formal logic are not applicable to moral reasoning because elements of choice and decision are involved in moral conduct. Therefore, it is possible, without any fear of committing a contradiction, to accept the moral rule, 'Every one ought to keep one's promises' together with the factual statement, "A promised to do Y" and not accept the judgment, "A ought to do Y". Such a situation arises when one is faced with a situation where two maxims of a moral system come in conflict with each other. In such a situation a decision is arrived at not only by considering the relevant facts of the situation but also by taking into account the probable consequences of following or not following anyone of the two conflicting maxims. Normally, it is on the basis of the strength of the expected consequences that one decides in favour of following one maxim and rejecting the other. Now, if an utterance E expressing a moral decision is said to follow deductively from a set of factual premises, F, together with a general moral rule, say, R, then it is logically improper to accept R and F and reject E. It would be so whether one calls the relationship between the premises consisting of R and F and the conclusion E that of "entailment" or that of "implication". And if the relationship between premises and the conclusion of an ethical argument is neither that of 'entailment' nor is it that of 'implication', then there is no use hankering after a deductive model of argument. If one insists on

calling such a pattern of reasoning deductive, one may; but it would be deductive in name only not in character.

However, to say that in an ethical argument the bond between the moral judgment and its supporting reasons is not as strong as in non-ethical arguments, is not to say that ethical reasoning is subjective. Similarly to say that the inference from a set of reasons to an ethical judgment is loose in the sense that it is not rigorous or determined is not to say that there are no objective grounds for making such an inference. Stevenson is right to the extent of saying that the relationship between the premises and the conclusion in an ethical argument is not formal, and that an ethical judgment is inferred from factual premises. But it does not mean, as he thinks, that the inference is psychological or that there are no objective grounds for making the inference. We have already argued⁷ for not accepting the Stevensonian analysis. The crucial objection to his analysis is that if we were to follow his method, we would not be able to distinguish between good and bad reasons in moral reasoning and, consequently, proper from improper inference in ethical arguments. Admitted that since ethical arguments are non-deductive; therefore the question of their being valid in the sense in which deductive arguments are valid does not arise. This does not, however mean that ethical arguments are not valid in any other sense different from the formal one. The difficulty with Stevenson is that even when he realizes the non-analytic, non-deductive

7. Supra, pp. 39-44.

character of moral reasoning, he does not offer any appropriate criterion or criteria on the basis of which we can distinguish between proper and improper inference, good and bad reasons.

The need for ethical justification arises when a moral judgment is challenged. We justify it by adducing reasons in its support. The reasons given in support are intended to supply evidence in favour of the judgment in question. Thus, when somebody offers a certain statement or a set of statements, $R_1, R_2, \dots R_n$, as reasons in support of the moral judgment P , what he is offering is evidence which is intended to support P . $R_1, R_2, \dots R_n$, thus, constitute the reasons from which P is inferred. This inference though not analytic has its own procedure. $R_1, R_2, \dots R_n$, and P , in an ethical argument are claimed to be so related that to believe $R_1, R_2, \dots R_n$, is to believe P . The justification of a moral judgment pre-supposes acceptance of a moral system. In a moral discourse it is from within a certain system that justification is given and rules of inference are drawn.

Ethics is the concern of human beings living in society. Therefore one's moral perception is subject to the social system one belongs to. Toulmin rightly claims⁸ that the notion of duty is 'intelligible' only in the context of communal life. Every society possesses a certain moral code consisting of a set of moral rules and moral principles such as "Every one ought to keep one's promises" or "Stealing is wrong" etc. These normal principles as rules of conduct function as rules of inference in a moral

8. Cf. Reason in Ethics, p. 133.

argument. But these moral rules are not so rigid as not to admit of any exception. They are not as strict as the axioms of formal logic. It is so as Mill points out because of "the complicated nature of human affairs"⁹. The rules of conduct cannot be so formulated as to admit of no exceptions. Hence no kind of action can be laid down as always obligatory or condemnable. Since moral rules are pliable, the relation between an ethical judgment and its supporting reasons in an argument cannot be as rigorous as in formal arguments.

The Moral rules of a system state what kinds of acts are generally permissible or not permissible, or what kinds of acts are right or wrong in that system. If certain kinds of actions are permissible under a moral rule, actions of that kind are right; and if certain kinds of actions are prohibited under a moral rule, then actions of that kind are considered wrong. Moral rules, since they state what kinds of actions are permissible or not permissible, they function like 'permits' or 'licences' for making legitimate inferences in moral arguments. Whether the inference, in a moral argument is proper or not can be determined by an appeal to a relevant moral rule. It is like showing a permit for doing a certain thing. Thus the legitimacy of the inference in moral arguments depends upon whether or not there is a required licence.

Thus, for example, in the argument, "X ought to have done Y because he promised A to do Y", the evidence, 'X promised A to do Y', constitutes the condition under which A is justified to say, "X ought to

9. J.S. Mill, Utilitarianism, Everyman's Library ed.; New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1910; Chapter II, p. 23.

have done Y". That it does constitute the condition can be shown by appealing to the relevant moral rule, 'Promises ought to be kept', or "Every one ought to keep one's promises."

Here, it is extremely important to note that the moral rule itself cannot be regarded as constituting a part of the evidence for making the judgment. The trouble with Toulmin's analysis, we have discussed¹⁰, is just this: He denies that ethical arguments are deductive, yet he wants to import into what he calls 'evaluative inference' the rigour of deductive inference. This he does by entering a moral rule as a reason in support of a moral judgment. However, a moral rule, for instance, 'Promises ought to be kept', itself does not function as a reason in support of the judgment. Rather it makes the statement "X promised A to do Y", a good reason for the judgment, "X ought to have done Y." The moral rules which function as licences or rules of inference behave like hypothetical statements. Thus, "Promises ought to be kept," can be remodelled as, "If one promises anyone to do something then one ought to do that." The hypothetical does not assert anything, it only authorizes us to assert the consequence if the condition mentioned in the antecedent is satisfied. It allows, us to make inference.

Somebody might argue that the judgment "X ought to have done Y", cannot be inferred from the statement "X promised A to do Y" alone, but only in conjunction with the moral rule "Promises ought to be kept."

10. Supra, pp. 75-80.

He would be right only if the inference in ethical arguments is taken to be analytic in nature which it is not. Moreover, the hypothetical embodying a moral rule cannot be used as one of the premises in the argument because it functions as a rule of inference and a rule of inference itself cannot be included in the premises. As Ryle points out: "The principle of an inference cannot be one of its premises or part of its premises. Conclusions are drawn from premises in accordance with the principles, not from premises that embody those principles. The rules of evidence do not have to be testified to by the witnesses."¹¹

Here, by, 'the principle of inference' Ryle does not mean only the rules of inference of a deductive system, but also "the most 'meaty' and determinate hypothetical statements like "If today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday." "¹²

The link between the supporting evidence and the moral judgment is provided by the moral rules accepted in one's society. A reason, therefore, would be a good reason if it relates the moral judgment in question with a moral rule. The legitimacy of the inference is, thus, granted by the rules prevalent in the society.

Two questions can be asked at this stage: (a) whether the rule referred to is actually a moral rule in the system, and (b) whether the rule is a correct rule. The first question can be answered by making

11. Gilbert Ryle, "If', 'So', and 'Because' ". Philosophical Analysis, ed. by Max Black, Prentice Hall Inc. 1963, pp. 306-7.

12. Ibid. p. 307.

an empirical investigation whether such and such is the case. It is like determining whether a permit is genuine or fake, valid or invalid. To find out the genuineness and the validity of a government permit, one has to see whether the permit is duly signed by the concerned authority and that it bears the seal of the signing authority etc. Similarly in case of a moral rule, one has to find out whether the rule in question actually forms a part of the moral system, and whether or not conflicts with any other moral rule of that system.

The second question concerns the propriety of the moral rule in question. It seeks justification of a moral rule itself. One cannot justify a moral rule in terms of one's 'approval' or 'disapproval'. That is, one cannot answer the question "Why ought promises be kept" by saying "Because I approve of it"; or "Most people approve of it". Nor, can one justify it by saying that if someone did not follow the rule, people would not believe him. The justification of a moral rule consists in showing that the rule performs the functions expected of it and of other moral principles. The function of a moral principle is to regulate our behaviour in such a way as to satisfy as far as possible the desires and aims of all the members of a community. There would not be any use of a moral code if it were not to serve this purpose. Communal living would be impossible if people did not control their behaviour so as to have regard for one another's interests. Therefore, any moral rule which tends to conflict with these functions has to be given up. It is like

cancelling or withdrawing a permit.

The view that I have argued for in the preceding pages has close affinity with that of Toulmin.

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